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## Events, Opportunities

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HEADLINE	01/04 Calif. cops more likely to stop Black teens
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/california-law-enforcement-race-and-ethnicity-9c1293c71162951735a9b8c30a5ded56">https://apnews.com/article/california-law-enforcement-race-and-ethnicity-9c1293c71162951735a9b8c30a5ded56</a>
GIST	LOS ANGELES (AP) — California law enforcement searched teenagers whom officers perceived to be Black at nearly six times the rate of teens believed to be white during vehicle and pedestrian stops in 2021, according to a state report released Tuesday.

The [annual report](#) by California's Racial and Identity Profiling Advisory Board — part of a law that initially took effect in 2018 — is among several reforms taken by the state in recent years amid increased focus on police brutality and racial injustice nationwide.

The board's report includes data on vehicle and pedestrian stops by officers from 58 law enforcement agencies in 2021. [The data includes what officers perceived](#) to be the race, ethnicity, gender and disability status of people they stop so that the state can better identify and analyze bias in policing.

The 58 agencies — which include the 23 largest departments in the state — collectively made more than 3.1 million vehicle and pedestrian stops in 2021. By April, all of California's more than 500 law enforcement agencies must submit their data.

The data includes how officers perceive an individual's race or gender, even if it's different than how the person identifies, because the officer's perception is what drives bias. The board's work informs agencies, the state's police officer training board and state lawmakers as they change policies and seek to decrease racial disparities and bias in policing.

In more than 42% of the 3.1 million stops by those agencies in 2021, the individual was perceived to be Hispanic or Latino, according to the report. More than 30% were perceived to be white and 15% were believed to be Black.

Statewide, however, 2021 Census estimates say Black or African American people made up only 6.5% of California's population, while white people were about 35%. Hispanic or Latino people made up roughly 40% of the state's population that year.

"The data show that racial and identity disparities persist year after year," the report said. "The Board remains committed to analyzing and highlighting these disparities to compel evidence-driven strategies for reforming policing and eliminating racial and identity profiling in California."

For example: Police handcuffed, searched or detained — either curbside or in a patrol car — individuals whom they believed to be Black youths between 15 and 17 years old during a higher percentage of traffic stops than any other combination of perceived race or ethnicity and age groups.

Law enforcement also searched people who were perceived to be Black at 2.2 times the rate of people thought to be white, the report said. And police were more than twice as likely to use force against people they thought were Black, as compared to people whom officers believed to be white.

Yet law enforcement officials reported taking no action most frequently after making stops of people they believed to be Black individuals, as compared to other racial and ethnic groups, "indicating those stopped Black individuals were not engaged in criminal activity," the report said.

"Based on the research, the Board believes that public health officials and policymakers should treat racial and identity profiling and adverse policing as significant public health issues," according to the report. "It is imperative to recognize that police interactions can negatively affect the mental and physical health of individuals who are Black, Hispanic/Latine(x), Indigenous, and people of color."

This year's report includes data from 40 more agencies than the 2020 report, meaning it analyzed an additional 246,000 stops. Of the 18 agencies that collected data in both years, 13 made fewer stops in 2021. The report said the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted those figures.

The 2021 findings were consistent with previous reports by the board that similarly showed law enforcement's racial and identity profiling through the traffic stops.

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HEADLINE	01/04 EU hails high gas storage levels
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/eu-hails-high-gas-storage-levels-despite-russian-96176120">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/eu-hails-high-gas-storage-levels-despite-russian-96176120</a>

GIST	<p>BRUSSELS -- Natural gas storage levels in the European Union stand at nearly 84% and were higher in December than the average amount in reserve 4-6 years ago, the EU's executive branch said Wednesday, despite Russian attempts to choke off supplies amid its war on Ukraine.</p> <p>Fearing winter shortages, the 27 EU countries began stocking up on gas last year. Joint gas reserve levels climbed to 82% by September, well ahead of an 80% target set for November. Gas consumption also dropped by 20% from August to November as prices spiked.</p> <p>Angered by EU war-related sanctions, Russia tightened its gas taps to Europe last year. Its pipeline gas accounted for 40% of all gas Europe imported before President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops into Ukraine in late February, but now it only accounts for around 9%.</p> <p>"It's a fairly good position to be in," EU commission spokesman Tim McPhie told reporters. "We have a healthy level of gas storage for the start of this year, but we are by no means complacent. We know that this year will continue to be challenging."</p> <p>The commission estimates that joint gas storage levels stand at almost 84%, and that storage levels in December were 13% higher than the EU average in 2016-2018. Energy prices have also tumbled in recent months, in part due to milder than expected winter weather.</p> <p>"The more we can invest in energy efficiency, reducing energy use, and the more that we can give a boost to renewables the better we will be based in terms of reducing our dependence on gas," which influences electricity prices and contributes to global warming, McPhie said.</p> <p>The first regular shipment of liquefied natural gas from the United States arrived in Germany on Tuesday, part of wide-ranging European efforts to find new, more reliable suppliers and replace resources once bought from Russia.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Attack casts threat assessment scrutiny</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/US/times-square-attack-casts-scrutiny-threat-assessment-us/story?id=96120575">https://abcnews.go.com/US/times-square-attack-casts-scrutiny-threat-assessment-us/story?id=96120575</a>
GIST	<p>A New Year's Eve <a href="#">machete rampage</a> targeting police officers in Times Square is the latest example of law enforcement failing to prevent an individual already on their radar from carrying out an act of violence, prompting some counterterrorism experts to call for a new model for evaluating would-be attackers.</p> <p>The Times Square assault on three New York City police officers came just weeks after <a href="#">the suspect</a>, 19-year-old Trevor Bickford of Maine, was placed on a federal watch list, authorities said. The FBI evaluated Bickford when his mother informed the agency he was gravitating toward Islamic extremism, officials said.</p> <p>While Bickford was placed on a federal no-fly list, he took an Amtrak train to New York allegedly intent on attacking police officers, authorities said.</p> <p>Bickford was taken into custody after being shot in the shoulder by a police officer. He is charged with two counts of attempted murder of a police officer and two counts of attempted assault. He remained in a hospital Tuesday evening, pending an arraignment.</p> <p>John Cohen, a former U.S. Department of Homeland Security acting undersecretary for intelligence, said the case is the latest in a string of attacks nationwide where law enforcement made contact with a suspect prior to an attack and assessed the potential for them to carry out a violent act.</p> <p>"It has become increasingly clear that the protocols used by federal and local authorities to assess the risk posed by individuals who exhibit threat-related behaviors is out of date and inconsistent with the current threat facing the nation," said Cohen, now an ABC News contributor.</p>

Cohen noted that suspects in several recent mass casualty incidents had been evaluated by law enforcement prior to committing the acts of violence, including Payton Gendron, the teenager who pleaded guilty to killing 10 Black people in a racially motivated [shooting in Buffalo](#), and Nikolas Cruz, who [pleaded guilty](#) to killing 17 students in 2018 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida.

Anderson Lee Aldrich, who allegedly killed five people and wounded 17 others at a gay nightclub in Colorado Springs in November, had been arrested in 2021 on allegations of making a [bomb threat](#) that led to the evacuation of about 10 homes. A year before he killed eight people at a FedEx facility in Indianapolis in 2021, [Brandon Scott Hole](#) was taken into custody by police and temporarily placed in a mental detention facility for further assessment after his mother complained he assaulted her when she asked what he was going to do with the gun, officials said.

[Omar Mateen](#), who in 2016 killed 49 people and wounded 53 more in a mass shooting at Pulse nightclub in Orlando, Florida, was allowed to legally purchase an AR-style rifle and a handgun, despite his name appearing on a federal watch list after being interviewed three times by the FBI in the years leading up to the massacre at the gay nightclub, according to authorities.

"We're still, from an investigator's perspective, looking for that Mohamed Atta," said Cohen, referring to one of the hijackers in the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. "We're looking for somebody who we can associate with a foreign terrorist group or looking at somebody who meets the threshold of a federal terrorism investigation."

Cohen added, "That's why we continue to see instances where people come to the attention of the bureau or law enforcement, they're assessed that way, they don't meet that threshold, they don't become the subject of a full-field investigation, yet they go out and commit an act of violence."

Cohen said threats today are very different from ones the nation faced on Sept. 11, 2001.

"We're not dealing with a group of sophisticated, ideologically motivated foreign terrorists. We're dealing with individuals, all of which, regardless of the motive, are experiencing somewhat consistent behavioral health issues."

He said a better approach, increasingly adopted by state and local agencies, is to "look at individuals holistically" when they come to the attention of law enforcement.

"What it entails is that you have specially trained law enforcement working with mental health professionals. They look at individuals holistically. Maybe they come to the attention of law enforcement initially because of their online behavior, maybe it's other behaviors they're exhibiting that family or others observe."

He said there are reams of data culled from mass shootings and terrorist attacks showing a common pattern of behavior in perpetrators that can be used in assessing risk.

"We're dealing with individuals, all of which, regardless of the motive, are experiencing somewhat consistent behavioral health issues," Cohen said. "They feel disconnected from community, they're angry, they're searching for a sense of life meaning, they come from dysfunctional family backgrounds, they spend a considerable amount of time online viewing content placed there by terrorist groups, by extremists, content regarding past shootings and other ideological or extremist content until ultimately they connect with something or a blend of beliefs, or a blend of beliefs and grievances."

Cohen said much of the new model for assessing the risk of such individuals is detailed in a [2015 FBI report](#) titled, "Making Prevention a Reality."

"Threat assessment is a systematic, fact-based method of investigation and examination that blends the collection of analysis of multiple sources of information with published research and practitioner

experience, focusing on an individual's patterns of thinking and behavior to determine whether, and to what extent, a person of concern is moving toward an attack," the report states.

The report adds, "By engaging in the assessment and management process as soon as a person of concern is identified, threat managers are more likely to succeed in preventing a violent outcome. Steering a person in a different direction early on may mean offering assistance to someone who needs it before that person concludes violence is necessary."

Thomas Galati, NYPD Chief of Intelligence and Counterterrorism, said the suspect in Saturday night's Times Square attack, was interviewed by FBI agents last month in Maine after his mother reported concerns that her son was possibly becoming radicalized. The FBI determined Bickford allegedly wanted to fight in Afghanistan and placed him on a federal watch list to prevent him from traveling overseas, Galati said.

"The way you know they (the FBI) took the traditional approach is they viewed the primary threat as his travel to Afghanistan," Cohen said. "So, they no-flyed him. They tried to restrict his ability to travel, but look what happened."

By contrast, he noted a recent case in Maryland, where a teenager posted on Instagram that he wanted to shoot up his high school and was reported to a school resource officer by classmates.

"The school resource officer went to the threat management unit, which did a threat assessment and deemed the person to be high risk," Cohen said. "They believed this person was on their way to engage in violence and they prevented it. They went to the courts, they invoked the red flag law. The person got additional mental health care."

But Cohen conceded there are likely "thousands" of reports like the one flagged to authorities in Maryland. "I acknowledge that it requires additional training, it requires resources, it requires a different way of looking at these issues," Cohen said. "But the alternative is we continue to experience the weekly shootings or other mass casualty attacks that we seem to be experiencing today."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Child tax credit checks to households stop</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/youre-not-getting-child-tax-credit-checks-anymore-heres-why/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/youre-not-getting-child-tax-credit-checks-anymore-heres-why/</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — If you raised children during the pandemic, you probably remember something remarkable: getting checks in the mail, every month, from the federal government.</p> <p>The expanded child tax credit provided a few hundred dollars to help pay for your son's braces or your daughter's ballet lessons — or to ease the stress over whether you had enough money to cover the mortgage. Then, one day, the checks just stopped coming.</p> <p>Jessica Hudson used her \$500 monthly payments for her 11-year-old son's child care after school while she juggled work and finished a political science degree at San Francisco State. But after the checks stopped, the hours she had devoted to classes were instead spent making stressful calls to coordinate school pickup or leaving campus early to do it herself.</p> <p>Hudson's son lost help with his homework and a support system she didn't have the capacity to offer as a single, working mother of two who was finishing school.</p> <p>"It changed how our family functioned," the 37-year-old recalled. "I remember feeling really resentful when it was ending because what was being communicated to people like me was, 'Get back to work.'" "A sudden end to the payments was not what the measure's boosters had intended, or its critics had feared.</p>



Supporters of the [2021 boost to the Child Tax Credit](#) — [part](#) of the \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief package — had intended it as an initial effort, not a one-off. They hoped that the measure would prove so successful, and so popular, that Congress would feel compelled to extend it.

The policy succeeded at reducing child poverty. The U.S. child poverty rate fell 46% to its lowest level in 2021, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The temporary credit lifted nearly 4 million children out of poverty and reduced the number of households that reported not having enough food.

The expanded benefit delivered more money to 61 million children in 36 million households and reached even the poorest families, who didn't qualify before because they had no income. The monthly payments allowed families to afford essentials, including groceries, rent and clothing, researchers found.

But as the pandemic receded, so did the expanded credit's chances of survival. In January 2022, [Republicans and Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin](#) refused to extend it. The effects of the program's end were immediate, driving 3.7 million more children back into poverty that month compared with the month before.

A year later, efforts to revive the \$100-billion program have failed again, erasing one of President Joe Biden's biggest domestic achievements and prompting the program's supporters to reflect on why a policy that changed so many people's lives just fizzled out.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., was always concerned the temporary nature of the credit would undercut its effects, she said.

"It didn't have enough time to just root in the way you need it to," said DeLauro, who advocated for an expanded child tax credit for two decades and pushed for its inclusion in the COVID-19 relief package. "You need permanence at the outset."

The policy's demise has confounded policy experts, who point to ample evidence that the increased benefit helped close gaps in the existing child tax credit.

"It was a policy that was intended in its design to help kids — and it did," said Megan A Curran, director of policy at the Center on Poverty and Social Policy at Columbia University.

Critics argued the revamped policy was too costly and guaranteed monthly payments would discourage parents from finding work. But research showed the 2021 payments [did not deter parents from working](#).

Though the Child Tax Credit has existed since 1997, 2021 was the first year families who pay no federal income tax were able to receive the benefit. The change increased the maximum benefit from \$2,000 to \$3,000 for parents of children age 6 to 17 and \$3,600 for parents of children under 6. The first half of the credit came in six monthly payments, with the second half delivered as a lump sum that families could claim in their tax returns — a policy structure that immediately reduced poverty, researchers say.

The credit was most beneficial to groups historically left out of the program: Black and Latino communities, single-parent households, large families, households in rural areas and those with young children, [according to researchers at Columbia University](#). Research showed 91% of low-income families used the money to afford basic household needs, according to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. But it also provided a much needed lifeline to middle-class families that advocates hoped would lead to its preservation.

"One person told me, 'I'm OK today, but I'm one car accident away from disaster,' " said Adam Ruben, director of the advocacy group Economic Security Project Action. "That's what it means to live without a safety net. It gives people a little bit of breathing room and cushion when something goes wrong."

The program received strong support among recipients of the money but failed to gain the sort of widespread backing that Democrats had hoped would ensure its survival.

“It’s baffling to me that it wasn’t more popular,” said Natasha Pilkauskas, a poverty researcher and associate professor of public policy at the University of Michigan.

The enhanced payment may have been lost in the wash of stimulus money Americans received at the height of the pandemic, Pilkauskas said. Some recipients may have thought that the money was part of the broader, temporary stimulus efforts, rather than a child-specific benefit that they could factor into their budget.

Manchin and Republicans cited concerns about the program’s price tag increasing inflation, but [a group of more than 200 economists](#) wrote an open letter earlier last month urging lawmakers to reinstate the expanded credit, arguing at under 0.4% of the GDP, it is “simply too small to meaningfully increase inflation” and would aid families in grappling with rising costs.

A group of Republican senators proposed their own version of the expanded benefit, but the plan excluded the nation’s poorest families and offset costs by cutting funding for other programs low-income families rely on — a nonstarter for Democrats. In December, lawmakers failed to reach a deal to tie it to expiring corporate tax cuts as part of a \$1.7 trillion spending bill in a last-ditch effort to renew it before Republicans take control of the House of Representatives this month.

Critics’ prevailing concern about the benefit is that it lacks a requirement that recipients work, a condition that supporters say prevents money from reaching the poorest families and one that skeptics argue would lead to a reduction in the labor force.

Incentivizing employment is the strongest path out of poverty, said Robert Doar, president of the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. The monthly federal payments failed to help families address some of the underlying issues that keep them in poverty, he said.

Doar, who spent two decades running social service programs for New York state and New York City, said the policy should be discussed alongside other antipoverty programs, including the earned income tax credit for low- and moderate-income working people, housing aid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and public health insurance.

“There’s a whole basket full of various efforts that as it plays out at the local level ... they get the benefit of these things combined,” he said. “You can’t talk about the child tax credit in isolation.”

Despite the partisan debate, advocates and opponents stress a child tax credit is still on the books. The program doubled in value under the Trump administration as part of the GOP tax law in 2017, a suite of tax provisions due to lapse at the end of 2025.

But under the existing CTC, about 19 million children aren’t receiving the full payment because their parents earn too little or no income. More than 50% of poor children in six California congressional districts receive only part of the \$2,000 credit or no credit at all because their family income is not high enough to qualify, according to a [2019 Columbia University report](#).

With the 2025 expiration of the Trump-era boost to the benefit on the horizon and some bipartisan support for a deal, some experts see room for more negotiations.

“Both parties agree the poverty effects are real — it’s in the data,” said Rachel Snyderman, senior associate director at the Bipartisan Policy Center.

Republicans will continue to focus on the price tag of further expanding the program and its effect on labor market participation. But a compromise could include providing part of the credit to all households with children and having another part phase in as income increases, Snyderman said.

	<p>“This is not the end of the line for expanded child tax credit,” Curran said. “It’s made the case for itself to be continued — whether that happens in a month or a year or however long it takes.”</p> <p>Though the pandemic-era expanded credit has already expired, families may not realize they’re losing out on the increased benefit until this year’s tax bill arrives. Lindsay Rojas, a coordinator for United Way Bay Area’s free tax help program, an antipoverty group, said she’s been preparing her team on how to be more empathetic with families in helping them understand the changes to the child tax credit.</p> <p>“There’s been a lot of layoffs so it’s probably going to be a startling realization for a lot of people once tax season kicks off,” she said.</p> <p>Despite an impasse on Capitol Hill, a dozen states and cities have implemented their own version of a child tax credit. In 2019, California became the first state to establish a young child tax credit, a \$1,000-a-year credit for low-income families with children under age 6. Families earning below \$25,000 received the credit but needed to show earnings as little as \$1 to receive it. In July 2022, the state removed its earning requirement. New Jersey and Vermont have followed suit in establishing permanent child tax credits while states like New Mexico have enacted short-term policies.</p> <p>States could go further on their own. If California replaced the young child tax credit with a broader \$1,700 child tax credit for children 18 and under, it could achieve a 25% reduction in child poverty, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, a tax policy think tank based in Washington, D.C.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 China’s Covid outbreak raises global alarm</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-urges-final-victory-over-covid-global-concern-mounts-over-spread-2023-01-04/">https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-urges-final-victory-over-covid-global-concern-mounts-over-spread-2023-01-04/</a>
GIST	<p>BEIJING, Jan 4 (Reuters) - Global health officials tried to determine the facts of China's raging COVID-19 outbreak and how to prevent a further spread as the Communist Party's mouthpiece newspaper on Wednesday rallied citizens for a "final victory" over the virus.</p> <p>China's axing of its stringent virus curbs last month has unleashed COVID on a 1.4 billion population that has little natural immunity having been shielded from the virus since it emerged in the central city of Wuhan three years ago.</p> <p>Many funeral homes and hospitals say they are overwhelmed, and international health experts predict at least one million deaths in China this year, but China has reported five or fewer deaths a day since the policy U-turn.</p> <p>"That is totally ridiculous," a 66-year-old Beijing resident who only gave his last name Zhang said of the official death toll.</p> <p>"Four of my close relatives died. That's only from one family. I hope the government will be honest with the people and the rest of the world about what's really happened here."</p> <p>China has rejected foreign scepticism of its statistics as politically motivated attempts to smear its achievements in fighting the virus.</p> <p>"China and the Chinese people will surely win the final victory against the epidemic," the People's Daily, the Communist Party's official newspaper, said in an editorial, rebutting criticism of China's three years of isolation, lockdowns and testing that triggered historic protests late last year.</p> <p>Having lifted the restrictions, Beijing is hitting back against some countries demanding that visitors from China show pre-departure COVID tests, saying the rules were <a href="#">unreasonable and lacked a scientific basis</a>.</p>



[Japan](#) became the latest country to require a pre-boarding negative test, joining the United States, Australia and others. [European Union health officials](#) are due to meet on Wednesday to discuss a coordinated response to China travel.

Willie Walsh, head of the world's biggest airline association IATA, also criticised the what he described as knee-jerk" measures that he said had proven to be ineffective in preventing the spread of COVID.

China, which has been largely shut off from the world since the pandemic began, will stop requiring inbound travellers to quarantine from Jan. 8. But it will still demand that arriving passengers get tested before they begin their journeys.

#### DATA DOUBTS

World Health Organization officials met Chinese scientists on Tuesday amid concern over the accuracy of China's data on the spread and evolution of its outbreak.

The U.N. agency had invited the scientists to present detailed data on viral sequencing, hospitalizations, deaths and vaccinations.

The WHO would release information about the talks later, probably at a Wednesday briefing, its spokesperson said.

Last month, Reuters reported that the WHO had not received data from China on new COVID hospitalisations since Beijing's policy shift, prompting some health experts to question whether it might be concealing the extent of its outbreak.

China reported five new COVID deaths for Tuesday, bringing the official death toll to 5,258, very low by global standards.

British-based health data firm Airfinity has said about 9,000 people in China are probably dying each day from COVID.

There were chaotic scenes at Shanghai's Zhongshan hospital where patients, many of them elderly, jostled for space on Tuesday in packed halls between makeshift beds where people used oxygen ventilators and got intravenous drips.

A Reuters witness counted seven hearses in the parking lot of Shanghai's Tongji hospital on Wednesday. Workers were seen carrying at least 18 yellow bags used to move bodies.

#### BOOKING BOOM

With COVID disruptions slowing China's \$17 trillion economy to its lowest growth in nearly half a century, investors are now hoping for policy stimulus.

China's yuan hovered at a four-month high against the dollar on Wednesday, after its finance minister pledged to step up fiscal expansion. The central bank has also flagged more policy support.

UBS analysts expect the "big bang" approach to re-opening to cause a "a deeper but shorter setback" to the economy, but also predicted that activity would recover from February.

Despite the new restrictions in some countries, interest in travelling abroad is reviving, Chinese media reported.

International flight bookings have risen 145% year-on-year in recent days, state-run China Daily reported, citing data from travel platform Trip.com.

	<p>Before the pandemic, global spending by Chinese tourists exceeded \$250 billion a year but the number of flights to and from China is still a fraction of pre-COVID levels.</p> <p>Thailand expects at least five million Chinese arrivals this year. More than 11 million Chinese visited Thailand in 2019, nearly a third of its total visitors.</p> <p>But there are already signs that an increase in travel from China could pose problems abroad.</p> <p>South Korea, which began testing travellers from China on Monday, said more than a fifth of the test results were positive.</p> <p>Authorities there were <a href="#">searching for one Chinese national</a> who tested positive but went missing while awaiting quarantine.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 China blames US for Covid cases</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/china-covid-19-state-media/2023/01/03/id/1102929/">https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/china-covid-19-state-media/2023/01/03/id/1102929/</a>
GIST	<p>The Chinese state-run Global Times made allusions Monday that "imported cases" of COVID-19 from the United States have been placed under "close loop management" and have not caused "large-scale local transmission."</p> <p>Amid China's grappling with President Xi Jinping's Zero-COVID policy, which has resulted in riots in the streets, the state-run paper's main focus was that Shanghai doctors were able to detect and contain the "Omicron sub-variants BQ.1 and XBB that have been prevailing in some overseas countries."</p> <p>The paper then made allusions to how strains were imported from the United States.</p> <p>"Among the 25 samples of XBB variants detected in Shanghai," according to the Times, "three were identified as XBB.1.5 subvariants, which has become dominant in the U.S., accounting for about 41% of confirmed COVID cases across the country, according to the data published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on Dec. 30, 2022."</p> <p>"According to the Chinese researchers, the samples were collected from imported cases that have not caused local transmission."</p> <p>"They also noted," the paper continued, "that the mutant strains imported from abroad are more complex and most of them are detected for the first time in China."</p> <p>After mentioning there was no "local transmission" of the imported strains half a dozen times, the Chinese paper, in an effort to show the state's competence in handling the matter, asserted Chinese social media was abuzz with theories of a COVID-variant such as XBB.1.5, which came from the U.S., had caused its citizens to experience waves of diarrhea.</p> <p>"A screenshot introducing XBB.1.5 variant became a trending topic on the Chinese social media on Dec. 31, 2022," according to the Times. "The screenshot said the variant that has prevalence in the U.S. mainly attacks heart, blood vessels, and stomach and suggested preparing Montmorillonite powder for diarrhea caused by XBB.1.5."</p> <p>The screenshot led to the selling out of the medicine at many pharmacies in Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen by New Year's Day, according to the report.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Colombia's ELN deny ceasefire agreement</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/colombia-guerrillas-deny-national-ceasefire">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/colombia-guerrillas-deny-national-ceasefire</a>

Colombia's largest remaining guerrilla group has contradicted government claims that they had agreed a national ceasefire, in a setback to plans to bring peace to the Andean nation after decades of violence.

President Gustavo Petro had announced on New Year's Eve that the country's five largest armed groups had agreed to a six-month truce, but on Tuesday the National Liberation Army (ELN) rejected the claims, saying it had not been consulted on any such plan.

"The ELN Dialogue Delegation has not discussed any bilateral ceasefire with the Gustavo Petro government, therefore no such agreement exists," the guerrillas [said in a statement](#).

The ceasefire was supposed to usher in a peaceful beginning to 2023 and kickstart [Petro's ambitious promise to bring "total peace"](#) to Colombia after more than six decades of brutal conflict and several false dawns.

An estimated 450,000 Colombians have been killed and 8 million displaced, making Colombia's internal conflict one of the deadliest in modern history.

A 2016 peace agreement removed the country's biggest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, from the many-sided conflict, but the country has failed to prevent smaller, less ideological organisations from filling the power vacuum that demobilisation left.

On taking office in August 2022 as the country's first ever leftist president, Petro promised to finally deliver peace by bringing armed groups to the negotiating table.

The former rebel said the ceasefire was a "bold act" and would initially last six months, with national and international mechanisms monitoring the truce's progress, but the pact was shot down before it could get going.

"This whole fiasco demonstrates how improvised many of the government's announcements are, declaring things without thinking them through with all the relevant stakeholders," says Sergio Guzmán, director of Colombia Risk Analysis.

Though Petro has made finally ending Colombia's six-decade long conflict a central issue and [began peace talks in Caracas with the ELN in November](#), security analysts are sceptical that he can deliver.

[Ten thousand combatants](#) are believed to be spread out across myriad competing armed groups who are warring for the control of lucrative drug trafficking routes and gold mining regions.

The ELN's announcement also adds to evidence suggesting that the group will be tough to negotiate with.

Unlike most of the other purely criminal organisations operating in Colombia, the ELN has ideological origins. The insurgency was founded in 1964 by Catholic priests who sought to emancipate the country through Marxism.

The group is believed to have [approximately 3,000-5,000](#) fighters but unlike most other armed factions it has a loose structure and flatter hierarchy, which makes the organisation harder to negotiate with.

Their rebuttal is likely a demand to be distinguished from the other, smaller criminal organisations and to receive special treatment, Guzmán says.

"This takes the air out of Petro's sails and his very broad efforts to declare victory for total peace," he says. "It's going to be very challenging to deal with these guys."

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SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-layoffs-are-happening-faster-than-at-any-time-during-the-pandemic-11672705089?mod=hp_list_pos4">https://www.wsj.com/articles/tech-layoffs-are-happening-faster-than-at-any-time-during-the-pandemic-11672705089?mod=hp_list_pos4</a>
GIST	<p>Technology-driven companies across industries have been <a href="#">laying off workers</a> at the fastest pace since the Covid-19 pandemic shocked the global economy in 2020, according to one data tracker.</p> <p>Collectively, employers in the slumping tech sector cut more than 150,000 jobs in 2022, based on estimates from <a href="#">Layoffs.fyi</a>, a website that tracks the events as they surface in media reports and company releases.</p> <p>That figure compares with about 80,000 layoffs in March-December 2020 and 15,000 in all of 2021, based on data compiled on the site.</p> <p>The tally was created by San Francisco internet entrepreneur Roger Lee, who launched the tracker after the pandemic struck “as a side project to create awareness around all of these tech layoffs, in the hopes of helping laid-off employees find a home.”</p> <p>The estimates include large employers such as Facebook parent <a href="#">Meta Platforms</a> Inc. (more than 11,000 <a href="#">layoffs announced</a> in November) and <a href="#">Amazon.com</a> Inc. (about 10,000 possible <a href="#">job cuts</a>), as well as smaller businesses in the U.S. and abroad.</p> <p>In the first year of the pandemic, tech employers announced more than 80,000 job cuts from March through December, according to Layoffs.fyi.</p> <p>In 2021, the website tracked far fewer layoffs among tech companies.</p> <p>Then in 2022, tech companies laid off more than 150,000 workers amid rising interest rates and signs of a cooling economy.</p> <p>Consumer and retail were the two hardest-hit parts of the tech sector in 2022, combining for about 40,000 layoffs. Facebook parent Meta Platforms accounted for roughly half of the cuts in the consumer group, while Amazon represented about half of those in retail.</p> <p>Nearly 100 healthcare-related tech companies laid off an estimated 11,000 employees in 2022.</p> <p>Many education-tech companies grew early in the pandemic when schools shut down and online learning spread. In 2022, ed-tech employers announced more than 8,000 job cuts.</p> <p>Travel-related tech companies were hit hard by layoffs in 2020 because of lockdowns and pandemic travel restrictions. In 2022, travel was among the areas that had the least job losses.</p> <p>The figures are rough estimates and don’t capture all layoffs, but reflect a trend that is playing out in many of the largest tech companies.</p> <p>For years, many tech companies aggressively added workers amid strong revenue growth and rising share prices. The hiring pace picked up during the pandemic as individuals and companies leaned on technology to help get through lockdowns and other Covid-related disruptions.</p> <p>Now, the same businesses are laying off employees, <a href="#">implementing hiring freezes</a> and cutting costs, as spending on tech products slows and the outlook for digital advertising dims. Some <a href="#">CEOs have apologized</a> for growing their payrolls too fast.</p> <p>The pullback in tech hiring has happened in a time when the <a href="#">broader labor market</a> has showed signs of resilience. There are several reasons for the apparent disconnect between news of tech firms cutting workers and the monthly government reports showing overall U.S. payrolls maintaining steady growth—one of which is that many laid-off tech workers are finding new jobs quickly.</p>

	About 79% of workers recently hired after a tech-company layoff or termination landed their new job within three months of starting their search, <a href="#">according to a ZipRecruiter survey</a> of new hires.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Sounder train ridership bounce back?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3767613/sounder-ridership-down-can-bounce-back/">https://mynorthwest.com/3767613/sounder-ridership-down-can-bounce-back/</a>
GIST	<p>Sounder train ridership has been down since the start of the pandemic, and it has yet to bounce back, according to Sound Transit.</p> <p>Back in October 2019, the Sounder trains had over 415,000 monthly passengers. In November 2022, it had less than 105,000. The decline begs the question. Where did all the passengers go?</p> <p>“They [passengers] are in their living rooms. At home. Working from home,” Sound Transit Public Information Officer David Jackson told KIRO Newsradio.</p> <p>According to the Downtown Seattle Association, as of October, just 36% of office workers had returned downtown — a far cry from their optimistic forecasts of 70% by the end of summer.</p> <p>Sounder is traditionally an office commuter ride with trains running early and during rush hour between Lakewood and Everett.</p> <p>Even though riders are back to work, they aren’t utilizing Sounder service like before. In October, only 6,000 daily commuters rode the train.</p> <p>Jackson said he’s hopeful ridership will increase with a new parking garage set to open in Puyallup this coming year.</p> <p>“I eventually think Sounder service will make a comeback. It’s an incredibly valuable service because it gets people off I-5,” he explained.</p> <p>Jackson notes that Sound Transit is doing everything it can to bring back passengers. “We are working on stationary improvements in Puyallup, Auburn, Kent, and Sumner.” That will include new parking facilities and make it easier for passengers to get to the station.</p> <p>Julie Timm, Sound Transit’s new CEO, told The Seattle Times it’s too early to make decisions concerning Sounder’s future.</p> <p>Meanwhile, transit agencies should make more investments to better connect their various modes, she recently argued in the pages of Passenger Transport, the newsletter for the American Public Transportation Association.</p> <p>With lower ridership comes dwindling revenue. The Times reports, “In 2018 and 2019, the train covered over 30% of its operating cost via fares. In 2020, it was just 11%, well below the agency’s target of 23%.”</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Police killed record number people in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7vkj9/2022-police-killings">https://www.vice.com/en/article/v7vkj9/2022-police-killings</a>
GIST	<p>American police killed more people last year than they have in nearly a decade, according to a nonprofit organization that has tracked and published data on deadly state violence since 2013.</p> <p><a href="#">Mapping Police Violence</a>’s 2022 tracking found that <a href="#">1,176 people died during encounters</a> with police last year, the highest number the organization has ever recorded. Samuel Sinyangwe, the creator of the project, <a href="#">said the number</a> includes anyone who was killed by police, be it by shooting or other forms of force. According to Mapping Police Violence, police killed the equivalent of 3.2 people per day in 2022—and there were only 12 days in the whole year when a deadly police encounter was not reported.</p>



More than a third of those killed by police encountered the authorities during a traffic stop, a mental health and welfare check, or a non-violent offense. All three of these causes for a police stop have been targeted for reform in multiple states because of how deadly they can be for civilians, particularly those who are not white. Elected leaders in Minnesota, California, and Pennsylvania for example, have passed legislation or enforced new policies [de-prioritizing non-public safety](#) traffic stops. [Aurora](#), Colo. has seen a significant push to reform how police interact with the mentally ill, and to give them the tools to deescalate these situations at risk of becoming violent.

As has been true for the last nine years, Mapping Police Violence's data shows that Black people made up a disproportionate chunk of those killed by cops in 2022, accounting for 24 percent of those killed, despite making up [just over 13 percent](#) of the population. One in three people killed by the police was fleeing the cops when they were killed, with Black, Hispanic, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders at least five to eight percent more likely to be killed while running or driving away compared to their white counterparts.

Perhaps the most alarming is how little accountability there has been as the number of police killings continues to grow. Though some of the highest profile instances of police violence saw a conviction in recent years, including that of Derek Chauvin in 2021, the overwhelming majority of officers still face no legal consequences when they take a life. According to the data, 98.1 percent of officers involved in the death of a citizen between 2013 and 2022 faced no charges. Less than 0.3 percent of officers were convicted.

The five departments in the country with the most deadly incidents were also located in some of the densest cities. The Los Angeles Police Department topped the list with 15 killings last year, followed by the Houston Police Department with 14 and the New York Police Department with 13. Members of the Albuquerque Police Department and the Phoenix Police Department killed 11 and 10 people respectively. While 2022 was a record year, data shows that police violence has been on the rise nationally since 2019. Last year [1,140 people were killed](#) by police, just five deaths short of the previous record high set in 2018.

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HEADLINE	01/03 China stole US nuclear bomb technology
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/chinas-nuclear-forces-built-part-us-technology/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/chinas-nuclear-forces-built-part-us-technology/</a>
GIST	<p>Beijing's rapid buildup of nuclear forces has been assisted by American nuclear and missile technology obtained by Chinese spies and through U.S. space and nuclear cooperation in the 1990s, according to a review of Chinese technology records and internal U.S. government documents.</p> <p>The Pentagon disclosed last month that China's stockpile will have at least 1,500 strategic nuclear warheads by 2035, up from 200 just a few years ago and 400 warheads today.</p> <p>Adm. Charles Richard, commander of U.S. nuclear forces until Dec. 9, further sounded the alarm on the Chinese nuclear expansion last month when he formally notified Congress that the size of Chinese nuclear forces exceeded those of the United States for the first time in one of three unspecified areas: warheads, long-range missiles or launchers.</p> <p>A year earlier, Adm. Richard notified Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin that China had formally reached a "strategic breakout."</p> <p>"A strategic breakout denotes the rapid qualitative and quantitative expansion of military capabilities that enables a shift in strategy and requires the DoD to make immediate and significant planning and/or capability shifts," he said in congressional testimony on April 5.</p> <p>Peter Huessy, the president of GeoStrategic Analysis who has studied China's nuclear buildup, said the expansion of China's nuclear arsenal is alarming and based substantially on American know-how that Beijing obtained legally and illegally over the decades.</p>

“The spectacular growth in Chinese nuclear forces as described recently by Adm. Richard highlights two things: First, the Chinese ambition to become a world military hegemon, and two, the unfortunate role of the often reckless transfer of nuclear applicable technology from the United States to China that facilitated this extraordinary growth,” Mr. Huessy said.

Under the Biden administration, the U.S. has made no significant shift in nuclear modernization plans beyond a multibillion-dollar effort to field new missiles, bombers and submarines.

Adm. Richard and other military and defense officials expressed alarm at the recent construction of three large bases in western China where up to 360 multiwarhead intercontinental ballistic missiles are being deployed.

“The new silos can be equipped with the solid-fueled, road-mobile CSS-10 Mod 2 capable of reaching the continental United States,” said Adm. Richard, using the NATO terms for what the Pentagon also calls the DF-31AG ICBM. “With this discovery, it is clear the People’s Liberation Army Rocket Force (PLARF) will soon achieve a robust ICBM capability,” he said.

The Pentagon’s annual report also said China is expected to deploy longer-range ICBMs called DF-41s in the silos of western China. The ICBMs will carry up to three warheads.

#### Modest beginnings

China’s long-range missile force included seven relatively inaccurate single-warhead intercontinental ballistic missiles just three decades ago, according to an internal 1993 White House document. The document, known as Presidential Review 31, said China would have 24 to 28 ICBMs capable of reaching the United States by 2000, “some of which may be MIRVed” — the term for multiple, independently targetable reentry vehicles.

Two Chinese coups targeting advanced American technology significantly accelerated the buildup of nuclear forces during the 1990s.

The first was a large-scale espionage program to steal nuclear warhead secrets. The CIA concluded in a public assessment that China had obtained information on every deployed U.S. warhead, particularly the compact W-88, which can be used on multiple-warhead missiles.

The second coup involved knowledge gleaned from U.S.-Chinese space cooperation during the Clinton administration. It resulted from a policy that loosened national security export controls to permit joint efforts with Beijing in space. Under the policy, U.S.-based Motorola and China’s Great Wall Industry Corp. agreed in 1993 to launch Iridium satellites on Chinese rockets.

Under the deal, China built a “smart dispenser” to Motorola’s specifications that allowed two satellites to be launched on a single rocket. Motorola denied that it improperly helped the Chinese build the dispenser.

A 1996 report by the National Air and Space Intelligence Center found that the smart dispenser could be used as a post-boost vehicle for China’s DF-5 ICBM.

The report concluded that the smart dispenser, with minimal modifications, “could be used to deploy multiple reentry vehicles” for ICBMs. By 2015, the Pentagon’s annual report revealed that the once single-warhead DF-5 included a modified version with multiple warheads.

Chinese nuclear expert Li Bin expressed Beijing’s reasoning on multiple warheads in a report published by the Carnegie Endowment in 2019.

“If we increase the number of warheads per missile, then this would clearly increase our nuclear strike capability,” he stated. “However, it would also increase the value of striking each MIRVed missile for China’s opponents.”

Mr. Li said China had avoided multiple-warhead missiles in the past to reduce the threat of preemptive attacks.

“Deploying several warheads on a single delivery system is like putting many of your eggs in one basket,” he stated. “Thus, when the risk of an incoming attack increases, decision-makers will be under pressure to use their MIRVed missiles as early as possible to prevent their baskets, and their eggs, from being destroyed.”

China’s official military newspaper, People’s Liberation Daily, has dismissed the Pentagon’s assertions about the challenges posed by China’s steady nuclear buildup. The paper accused U.S. military officials under President Trump and President Biden of fabricating a “China threat” to get more funding from Congress.

“The Biden administration has further detailed the nuclear deterrence strategy customized by the Trump administration to target China and Russia,” the outlet reported on Dec. 12.

Adm. Richard said he believes China’s strategic breakout is for use in a “coercive nuclear strategy.” Such a strategy could allow Beijing to intimidate the U.S. and its regional allies in standoffs over issues such as the future of Taiwan and control of the South China Sea and East China Sea.

#### Shift to multiwarhead missiles

As it accumulates wealth and technological expertise, China is moving away from single-warhead missiles, the Pentagon says. The latest annual report says the People’s Liberation Army will place multiple warheads on its 20 DF-5s and will add at least three warheads to the DF-31AG and DF-41 land-based missiles and the new JL-3 submarine-launched missile.

Critics say the progress is especially galling because Chinese nuclear warhead technology was greatly assisted by espionage that targeted U.S. nuclear weapons laboratories and through another Clinton administration program that promoted exchanges between U.S. nuclear scientists and their Chinese counterparts.

In September, a study by the private intelligence firm Strider revealed that China’s targeting of nuclear laboratories for secrets began in the 1980s and was later modified to recruit nuclear scientists more efficiently. From 1987 to 2021, at least 162 scientists who had worked at Los Alamos traveled to China to assist with sensitive projects. Fifteen of them were formerly on the staff at the lab.

“The Los Alamos case shows how China’s rapid advances in certain key military technologies are being aided by individuals who participated in sensitive U.S. government-funded research,” the report said.

The loss of W-88 warhead design information first came to the attention of U.S. counterintelligence officials at the Energy Department in 1992 after China tested a nuclear warhead that appeared similar in design to the W-88. Three years later, a nuclear defector gave the CIA an official classified Chinese document that revealed specific design information on the W-88 and other warheads.

The officials learned from the Chinese defector that the test involved a 150-kiloton explosion that used a particular oval-shaped core, leading analysts to conclude that China had copied the warhead design from the American design.

#### Missile secrets compromised

The revelations led to an uproar on Capitol Hill. A special congressional investigative committee led by Rep. Christopher Cox, California Republican, concluded in its 1999 final report that Chinese intelligence agents had obtained secrets on seven U.S. thermonuclear bombs, including the W-88.

“The PRC stole classified information on every currently deployed U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM),” the congressional committee report said.

A 2001 Congressional Research Service report said two U.S.-based companies, Space Systems Loral and Hughes Electronics Corp., had helped develop Chinese missiles.

The report cited a 1997 classified analysis by the Pentagon’s Defense Technology Security Administration that said Loral and Hughes had transferred expertise to China that “significantly enhanced the guidance and control systems of its nuclear ballistic missiles” and that “United States national security has been harmed.”

The list of classified U.S. material obtained by China included information on the W-56 Minuteman II ICBM, the W-62 Minuteman III ICBM, the W-70 Lance short-range ballistic missile (SRBM), the W-76 Trident C-4 SLBM, the W-78 Minuteman III Mark 12A ICBM, the W-87 Peacekeeper ICBM and the W-88 Trident D-5 SLBM.

The W-88 is the most sophisticated strategic nuclear warhead in the U.S. arsenal and is deployed on the Trident D-5 submarine-launched missiles.

A report on Chinese intelligence targeting of U.S. nuclear weapons stated that Chinese spies were able to steal the design information for the W-88 from 1984 to 1988. “To obtain this information the United States conducted tens of nuclear tests,” the report said. “Once obtained, the Chinese were able to accelerate their research and advance their nuclear weapons program well beyond indigenous capabilities.”

The report said Peter Lee, a contract employee at the Los Alamos National Laboratory, traveled to China in 1985. During a meeting in his Beijing hotel room, two Chinese officials persuaded Lee to provide China with classified information on nuclear weaponry.

Lee pleaded guilty to passing defense secrets to China in 1998 and was sentenced to one year in prison.

The secrets that Lee provided to the Chinese included information on an advanced radar technology that was being developed to track submarines.

Lee was part of a U.S.-China nuclear exchange program that began in the 1980s, ended in 1983 and resumed in 1993.

Another Los Alamos nuclear scientist, Wen Ho Lee, was investigated by the FBI in 1999 as a suspect in the loss of warhead secrets.

Lee was charged with removing magnetic computer tapes from Los Alamos’ X Division, where nuclear weapons are designed. According to court papers, the missing tapes, which were never recovered from Lee, contained blueprints of the entire U.S. nuclear warhead arsenal, including the exact shapes and dimensions and the materials used in design and construction.

Lee said FBI counterspies improperly targeted him because he was Chinese American. He sued the Justice Department with claims that disclosures to the press violated his privacy rights. The civil case was settled in 2006 with an award of \$1.6 million.

He pleaded guilty in 2000 to lesser charges of mishandling classified information, specifically unauthorized possession and control of national defense documents and restricted data on a tape.

CIA damage assessment

In 1999, U.S. intelligence agencies conducted a damage assessment of China’s theft of nuclear weapons data and the impact on the future development of Chinese weapons. The agencies concluded that the stolen

information “allowed China to focus successfully down critical paths and avoid less promising approaches to nuclear weapon designs.”

Beijing’s quest for critical nuclear technology was broad-based and tapped multiple sources, U.S. agencies said.

“China obtained at least basic design information on several modern U.S. nuclear re-entry vehicles, including the Trident II (W88),” the CIA said. “China’s technical advances have been made on the basis of classified and unclassified information derived from espionage, contact with U.S. and other countries’ scientists, conferences and publications, unauthorized media disclosures, declassified U.S. weapons information, and Chinese indigenous development.”

The weapons information “made an important contribution to the Chinese objective to maintain a second-strike capability and provided useful information for future designs,” the assessment said.

China’s ICBM force today is backed by more than 900 theater-range intermediate- and medium-range ballistic missiles. Outfitted with nuclear warheads, the missiles “are capable of doing catastrophic damage to United States, allied and partner forces in the region,” Adm. Richard said. “Combined, this formidable arsenal is cause for concern.”

To provide missile warning, China has deployed large phased-array radars in the past year, the admiral said. It was yet another technological advance where sensitive U.S. technology played a role.

China obtained technology for phased-array radars in 2005 from defense contractor Power Paragon, a unit of L-3 Communications, in the spy case involving Chinese American electrical engineer Chi Mak. Mak was convicted of conspiring to send defense technology to China in 2007 and was sentenced to 24 years in prison. He died in prison in October.

China military affairs expert Rick Fisher said it is likely that U.S. nuclear warhead design insights boosted China’s breakout to nuclear superiority over the United States.

China’s stockpile could exceed 4,000 warheads in the coming years based on the country’s development and deployment of small MIRVs, he said. A Chinese source in 2017 said the DF-41 ICBM could carry up to 10 warheads weighing 165 kilos each. He said the source’s information could not be confirmed.

“In 1999, the Cox Commission stated that China had obtained critical information on the W-76 warhead of the Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile,” said Mr. Fisher, a senior fellow with the International Assessment and Strategy Center. “Though its true weight is classified, some observers note the W-76 weighs less than 165 kilos, which may mean that China was able to help its design of lightweight warheads after gaining access to design information from U.S. warheads like the W-76.”

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HEADLINE	01/03 Covid wary but eager for China to reopen?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/asian-neighbors-wary-of-covid-19-but-eager-for-cas/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/asian-neighbors-wary-of-covid-19-but-eager-for-cas/</a>
GIST	<p>SEOUL — With China’s vast population finally freed to travel as Beijing lifts its prohibitive “zero-COVID” quarantine requirements on Sunday, wary nations across East Asia are strategizing ways to handle a sudden influx of pent-up Chinese tourism demand.</p> <p>Given the COVID-19 surge in China as the communist regime abandons its strict shutdown policies while offering only hazy numbers of new cases, regional capitals are divided on whether and how to welcome lucrative Chinese tourism and its much-needed yuan.</p> <p>On China’s periphery, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, all run by pro-American governments and wary of what Chinese tourists could be carrying, are imposing specific measures on travelers from the mainland.</p>



Meanwhile, the Southeast Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam are declining to apply special measures against Chinese visitors.

The Northeast Asian democracies, all manufacturing powerhouses, rely less on tourism than their sunnier Southeast Asian counterparts. In recent years, however, Japan and South Korea have promoted inbound travel while Vietnam has become a rising force in high-technology manufacturing.

After three years of taking the zero-COVID approach, the government of Chinese President Xi Jinping relented last month in the face of growing public unrest and abandoned mass lockdowns and mass testing. Reports from the country suggest that the shift has ignited a dangerous spread of the coronavirus, with hospital ICUs and crematoriums running at capacity. In response, Beijing has curbed or canceled the release of updated numbers on COVID-19 cases and death rates.

That lack of transparency sparked rare criticism from officials at the U.N. World Health Organization, who said they were “extremely concerned.” Others said China is lagging behind its regional neighbors, which have moved to gradual reopenings as COVID-19 rates fall.

“The world has gone through so much with COVID, so many lessons have been learned,” Jerome Kim, director general of the International Vaccine Institute, told The Washington Times. “A country that was so successful at ‘zero-COVID’ could have planned a successful release like Australia or South Korea.”

#### Mass export of COVID

For governments, the situation raises the risk of a mass export of COVID-19 from the world’s most populous country. Last week, Beijing announced that it would scrap quarantine restrictions for travelers and start reissuing passports and visas. With reports from China that online travel bookings are spiking, the floodgates could open.

Whatever public health challenge that presents, no government can ignore economics. China is by far the richest font of outbound tourists on the planet.

In 2019, the year before COVID-19 decimated travel, Chinese tourists spent \$254.6 billion worldwide, according to the U.N. World Tourism Organization.

The spending power of Chinese tourists far outstrips any other. The next-biggest spenders were Americans, with \$152.3 billion, followed by Germans, with \$92.2 billion.

There is little time to prepare tourism and immigration systems for a Chinese influx. Although New Year’s Day is over, China’s – and the region’s – biggest holiday is imminent.

China’s Lunar New Year runs for eight days starting this year on Jan. 21. During the holiday in 2019, some 415 million Chinese traveled internally and 6.3 million traveled overseas. Some travel analysts said it was the world’s biggest annual migration.

It represents a potential windfall for regional tourism sectors, which badly need the business after two years of pandemic shutdowns.

When COVID-19 expanded from China in early 2020, global tourism shriveled. Tourism revenue in 2020 was \$935 billion short of the 2019 figure, pushing the sector back to levels not seen in three decades, the UNWTO estimated.

The U.N. analysts found that the Asia-Pacific region was hit hardest after an 82% drop in tourism. Tourism in Europe and the Americas declined by 68%.

#### Different paths

What are governments to do? Approaches vary.

South Korean airports this week reportedly experienced significant delays as authorities began administering COVID-19 tests for travelers arriving from China. Seoul announced the policy at the end of December. Even after taking the test, all arrivals from China must self-isolate for two days pending negative results. Those procedures do not apply to tourists from other nations.

South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo visited Incheon International Airport, where some travelers reported complaints.

On Friday, Japan mandated COVID-19 tests for all arrivals from China. It previously applied that policy only to those who showed signs of infection. Taiwan also announced that it would be testing all arrivals from mainland China starting on the first day of 2023.

Nations in Southeast Asia, many of whose economies are far more dependent on tourism as a percentage of gross domestic product, are more flexible in welcoming back Chinese tourists.

Health authorities in Hanoi, citing the large numbers of Vietnamese who have been vaccinated against COVID-19 or who have been infected and recovered, said last week that it would not ban or test incoming Chinese.

Thailand anticipates some 5 million Chinese visitors this year.

Indonesian health authorities have not announced any specific steps for visitors from China.

Malaysia said it would not test Chinese travelers but would monitor toilet wastewater on aircraft arriving from Chinese airports for signs of the coronavirus.

The Philippines' policy is unclear, but Manila has cited an urgent need for special monitoring of visitors from China.

Beijing has taken notice of special precautions in France, Italy, Israel, Australia, Canada and the U.S.

The state-controlled Global Times news website charged that these nations "see China's reopening as another chance to defame Beijing" and "the U.S. propaganda machine is also running like crazy to smear China."

Still, the Global Times acknowledged that Chinese caseloads have been "ballooning in the recent exit wave" and quoted a doctor as saying, "It is hard to get an accurate grasp of the death rate when the infection spreads fast."

Mr. Kim of the International Vaccine Institute said there was a danger of successive waves of infection as Chinese domestic and international travel increases during the Lunar New Year.

The efficiency of China's domestic COVID-19 vaccines poses another worry. Though the data is inconclusive, Mr. Kim noted reports that China's two primary vaccines, with 51% and 79% efficacies, don't match Western mRNA vaccines, with 90% efficacy.

"The population is big enough, with high- and low-density areas, that there could be successive waves," he said. "In the U.S., it tends to start on the coasts, migrates in, then bounces back out, and China is big enough for that to be seen as well."

A combination of widespread infections with low booster rates among elderly Chinese could trigger a major public health crisis. "The implications are the spread of a generation of new variants we really don't know about," Mr. Kim said.

HEADLINE	<b>01/03 US, SKorea joint nuclear exercises?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/biden-contradicts-south-korean-leader-over-joint-n/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/biden-contradicts-south-korean-leader-over-joint-n/</a>
GIST	<p>President Biden contradicted a claim by South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol that the two countries are in talks for joint nuclear exercises, saying there are no discussions about the idea.</p> <p>Mr. Yoon told a South Korean newspaper on Monday that joint military exercises involving nuclear weapons are under consideration and that the U.S. is “quite positive” about the idea.</p> <p>The South Korean leader said the exercises would focus on the U.S.’ ability to deter attacks on its allies.</p> <p>“The nuclear weapons belong to the United States, but planning, information sharing, exercises, and training should be jointly conducted by South Korea and the United States,” Mr. Yoon said.</p> <p>Hours later, Mr. Biden contradicted Mr. Yoon’s claim when asked about them as he returned to Washington from a holiday vacation in St. Croix.</p> <p>“President Biden, are you discussing joint nuclear exercises with South Korea right now?” a reporter asked.</p> <p>“No,” Mr. Biden said.</p> <p>The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment. It’s unclear if Mr. Biden was aware of any talks among U.S. and South Korean officials.</p> <p>Despite Mr. Biden’s denial, Seoul continued to insist that both countries are in talks about joint nuclear exercises.</p> <p>Kim Eun-hye, Mr. Yoon’s senior secretary for press affairs, said Mr. Biden had to deny such a direct question due to the sensitive nature of the topic.</p> <p>“In order to respond to the North Korean nuclear weapons, the two countries are discussing ways to share information on the operation of U.S.-owned nuclear assets, and joint planning and execution of them accordingly,” Ms. Kim said in a statement.</p> <p>It’s not the first time Mr. Yoon has clashed with his U.S. counterpart.</p> <p>In September, Mr. Yoon was caught on a microphone at the United Nations in New York saying it would be “so humiliating” if Congress rejected his \$6 billion promise to global health projects.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 EU offers China help to counter Covid</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/eu-offers-help-prepares-to-counter-chinas-covid-19/">https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/jan/3/eu-offers-help-prepares-to-counter-chinas-covid-19/</a>
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union said Tuesday it has offered China help to deal with its COVID-19 crisis, including the donation of vaccines, as the bloc seeks to coordinate how authorities should check incoming passengers from China for any new variants.</p> <p>Several member nations announced individual efforts over the past week. At the same time, the EU’s European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control insisted that the situation in China didn’t pose an immediate overall threat to health.</p> <p>“The variants circulating in China are already circulating in the EU, and as such are not challenging for the immune response” of EU citizens, it said in its latest impact study published Tuesday.</p>

Yet fearful not to be caught unawares like at the outset of the global pandemic in early 2020, medical experts from EU member states were already preparing potential action to be taken up by an Integrated Political Crisis Response meeting on Wednesday, where measure like EU-wide entry requirements could be decided.

“Travelers from China need to be prepared for decisions being taken at short notice,” Sweden, which holds the EU presidency, warned in a statement.

The European Commission said Tuesday that over the past several days that the bloc had already reached out to Beijing to offer help, including expertise, medical information and vaccine donation. No specific information was immediately available. The Financial Times first broke the news.

Over the past week, EU nations reacted in a chaotic cascade of national measures to the crisis in China, disregarding an earlier commitment to act in unity before anything else.

Italy was the first EU member in requiring coronavirus tests for airline passengers coming from China, but several others have said such measures might not be the best option to protect local populations since new variants now coming from China have already been around in Europe, often for many months.

France, Spain and Italy have already announced independent measures to implement tougher COVID-19 measures for passengers arriving from China.

France’s government is requiring negative tests, and is urging French citizens to avoid nonessential travel to China. France is also reintroducing mask requirements on flights from China to France.

Spain’s government said it would require all air passengers coming from China to have negative tests or proof of vaccination.

The United States announced new COVID-19 testing requirements Wednesday for all travelers from China, joining some Asian nations that had imposed restrictions because of a surge of infections.

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HEADLINE	01/03 Omicron subvariant XBB.1.5
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/could-new-omicron-variant-xbb15-fuel-further-covid-infections">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/could-new-omicron-variant-xbb15-fuel-further-covid-infections</a>
GIST	<p>Scientists have raised concerns about a new Covid variant that is spreading fast in the US and threatening to cause further waves of infection. Here’s what we know so far.</p> <p><b>What is the new variant called?</b> It’s known as XBB.1.5. It’s one of the latest descendants of Omicron, the highly transmissible version of Covid that caused cases to surge in the UK last winter. Offshoots of Omicron have dominated global Covid infections ever since. XBB.1.5 evolved from the XBB variant of Omicron, itself a fusion of two different BA.2 variants.</p> <p><b>How fast is it spreading?</b> The variant seems to have arisen in or around New York state in late October. At the end of December, the number of cases in the US more than doubled in a week. It now accounts for about 40% of all Covid infections in the US. Hospitalisations are rising in New York, raising fears that XBB.1.5 is about to cause further waves of illness as it spreads to other countries. Some US estimates suggest that XBB.1.5 is spreading more than twice as fast as the BQ.1.1 variant, which is one of the most common variants found in the UK.</p> <p><b>Why is it spreading so rapidly?</b> The variant has an unusual mutation known as F486P that is helping it spread. The mutation changes part of the Covid virus that many antibodies from vaccination or previous infection target. The change makes</p>

the antibodies less effective at neutralising the virus. The parent variant, XBB, has a different mutation at the same position. This makes XBB good at evading immune defences too, but the mutation comes with a cost: the virus cannot latch on to human cells as effectively, so the virus is actually less infectious. The XBB.1.5 offshoot suffers no such handicap: the F486P mutation allows it to evade antibodies without compromising how well it attaches to human cells. In fact, it binds to them even more strongly than XBB, driving up its infectivity. “The mutation can give that immune evasion without the cost to infectivity and that’s why it’s become so successful,” says Ravi Gupta, professor of clinical microbiology at the University of Cambridge.

#### **Has the virus reached the UK?**

Scientists in the UK analyse the genetics of only a fraction of Covid samples now, so there’s some uncertainty around XBB.1.5. But the variant has been detected here, and surveillance suggests it makes up at least 4% of Covid viruses being sequenced.

#### **Does it cause more severe disease?**

There is no evidence that XBB.1.5 causes more severe disease than other Omicron variants. But the fact that it is spreading fast is worrisome, as the virus is more likely to reach vulnerable people who could be hospitalised or die from the infection, especially if they have not received their latest booster.

#### **Will it spark another wave?**

That is the concern. In the US, scientists suspect XBB.1.5 is at least partly responsible for the rise in hospital admissions in New York, though cold weather and indoor gathering will also contribute. It is unclear whether the variant will drive a big surge in the UK, but some rise is anticipated. “It might drive an increase in cases, but I’m not convinced this will necessarily cause an explosive wave of infections in the UK,” says Gupta. “I don’t think there’s any cause to panic. The main thing we worry about is the severity of the disease, and there is no evidence that it’s more severe. People should, however, make sure they are up to date with their vaccines.”

Paradoxically, the winter wave of influenza and other nasty respiratory viruses that are doing the rounds might blunt any spike in Covid. If you catch a virus it should activate the innate immune system, the body’s frontline defences against pathogens, offering at least some protection against viruses that follow soon after. So if you caught flu or another respiratory virus over Christmas, your immune defences might resist a brief encounter with Covid.

#### **What do scientists advise?**

Vaccines are still the best way to protect against severe Covid, but Sam Wilson, a professor of virology at the University of Glasgow, says taking familiar Covid precautions will also help. “Regardless of the impact of a new variant, the NHS is already under tremendous pressure from a cocktail of different viruses this winter,” he says. “Where it is possible, taking voluntary steps to reduce transmission – reducing contacts, wearing high-quality masks in crowded indoor spaces, and isolating if you have symptoms – will help reduce the pressure on the NHS.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Day 315 of the Russia invasion</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-315-of-the-invasion">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/russia-ukraine-war-at-a-glance-what-we-know-on-day-315-of-the-invasion</a>
GIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Russia’s defence ministry said on Wednesday that 89 servicemen were killed in the Ukrainian attack on Makiivka</b> in the Moscow-controlled Donetsk region. It said the main reason for the attack was unauthorised use of mobile phones by troops. Russia previously said 63 of its soldiers were killed in the strike just after midnight on New Year’s Day.</li><li>• The Ukrainian strike on Makiivka generated “<b>significant criticism of Russian military leadership</b>”, according to a report from the Institute for the Study of War (ISW). Several prominent Russian pro-war bloggers and commentators acknowledged the attack, with many suggesting the number of casualties was higher than the figures officially reported.</li></ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The general staff of Ukraine’s armed forces has said <b>up to 10 units of Russian military equipment</b> of various types in occupied Makiivka were damaged or destroyed. Ukraine rarely announces responsibility for attacks on Russian-controlled territory in Ukraine, but its military reported the Makiivka attack as “a strike on Russian manpower and military equipment”.</li> <li>• <b>Satellite <a href="#">images</a> taken by the US-based company Planet Labs that purportedly show the aftermath of the strike on Makiivka have circulated online</b>, showing the building that allegedly housed the Russian troops before and after it was hit. The images, dated 2 January, show a building almost completely razed. Unverified <a href="#">footage posted online</a> of the aftermath of the blast also showed a huge building reduced to smoking rubble.</li> <li>• The UK’s prime minister, Rishi Sunak, reaffirmed <b>support for Ukraine during a call with Volodymyr Zelenskiy</b>. The two men discussed further defence cooperation, their statements said.</li> <li>• On national television in Ukraine, Yuriy Ignat, spokesperson for the Ukraine air force, said <b>nearly 500 Russian drones have been downed since September</b>.</li> <li>• It is <b>unlikely Russia will achieve a significant breakthrough near Bakhmut</b> in Ukraine’s eastern Donetsk region in the coming weeks, the UK Ministry of Defence has said. This is due in part to Russia likely conducting offensive operations in the area at only platoon or section level, it said.</li> <li>• <b>The French prime minister, Élisabeth Borne, has said she is more confident over the situation of French energy supplies for the next few weeks</b>. She cited lower consumption and an increase in nuclear power output.</li> <li>• <b>Nato countries will discuss their defence spending targets</b> in the coming months as some of them call for turning a 2% target into a minimum figure, the Nato secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, told the German news agency DPA.</li> <li>• <b>Ukraine and the EU will hold a summit in Kyiv on 3 February</b> to discuss financial and military support, Zelenskiy’s office has said.</li> </ul>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Wagner Group: Russia offensive stalls</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/ukraine-wagner-leader-counts-cost-as-russian-offensive-stalls-in-bakhmut">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/ukraine-wagner-leader-counts-cost-as-russian-offensive-stalls-in-bakhmut</a>
GIST	<p>The head of the Russian Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has said his fighters have sometimes spent weeks attempting to capture a single house in the key contested Donbas city of Bakhmut, in the latest evidence of how the Kremlin’s efforts there have stalled.</p> <p>In a grim video released over new year, Prigozhin – a key ally of Putin – was filmed visiting a basement near the eastern front filled with the bodies of his fighters, many of them convicts, who had been killed during the bitter fighting for the city, a key Russian objective since the summer.</p> <p>In the makeshift morgue, Prigozhin is seen being shown bodies on stretchers and in body bags. One pile of bagged bodies can be seen stacked shoulder-high in the corner of one of the rooms.</p> <p>“Their contract has finished, they will go home next week,” Prigozhin can be heard saying, adding: “These are getting ready to be sent. We all work during New Year’s Eve.</p> <p>“Here lie Wagner fighters who died at the front. They are now being put in zinc coffins and they will return home.”</p> <p>As more bodies are seen being taken off a truck, Prigozhin can be heard offering new year greetings.</p> <p>Wagner has played a key role in the Russian offensive against Bakhmut, with Ukrainian soldiers interviewed by the Guardian saying Wagner fighters were often used as shock troops in frontal assaults on their positions, while recently mobilised Russians are deployed in more defensive roles.</p>

While it has long been suggested by Ukrainian sources, and Russian military blogs, that Wagner has suffered heavy losses in the months-long assault, the footage – and Prigozhin’s commentary – have underlined the heavy scale of the attrition.

In a second clip of footage from his visit to the eastern front, Prigozhin confirmed the difficulties his forces were encountering. “Everyone wants to know when we will capture [Bakhmut],” he explains, using the Russian name for the city, Artemovsk.

“In Artemovsk, every house has become a fortress. Our guys sometimes fight for more than a day over one house. Sometimes they fight for weeks over one house. And behind this house, there is still a new line of defence, and not one. And how many such lines of defence are there in Artemovsk? Five hundred would probably not be an exaggeration.”

An unnamed Wagner soldier whom Prigozhin meets complains about the difficulties they are facing there. “We don’t have enough equipment, not enough BMP3 [armoured cars] and shells,” he says.

In separate footage from Bakhmut filmed on 2 January, a Ukrainian soldier named Kiyanyyn describes the continuing combat. Amid the sound of shelling, he describes how fighters in his sector of the city have repelled several large-scale attacks against the city he calls “the fortress”.

“They were coming like insects. We had to resupply with ammo several times ... The defence line is standing and holding.”

The latest fighting in the east came as Ukraine’s president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Russia was preparing to step up its attacks on the country using Iranian-made exploding drones.

“We have information that Russia is planning a prolonged attack by Shaheds [exploding drones]” Zelenskiy said in his nightly video address late on Monday.

He said the goal was to break Ukraine’s resistance by “exhausting our people, [our] air defence, our energy”, more than 10 months after Russia invaded its neighbour.

Zelenskiy was speaking after the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, appeared to be exploring ways to regain momentum in his flawed war effort, which in recent months has been frustrated by a Ukrainian counteroffensive backed by western-supplied weapons.

In the latest embarrassment for the Kremlin, Ukrainian forces fired rockets on New Year’s Eve at a facility in the eastern Donetsk region where hundreds of Russian mobilised soldiers were stationed. According to a statement by Russia’s defence ministry late Tuesday, at least 89 Russian soldiers died in the attack.

Other, unconfirmed reports put the death toll higher.

It is the largest number of casualties in a single incident admitted by Moscow since the war began more than 10 months ago.

In the attack, Ukrainian forces fired six rockets from a Himars launch system, and two of them were shot down, a Russian defence ministry statement said.

However, the strategic communications directorate of Ukraine’s armed forces claimed on Sunday that about 400 mobilised Russian soldiers were killed in a vocational school building in Makiivka, and about 300 more were wounded. That claim could not be independently verified.

The Russian statement said the strike occurred “in the area of Makiivka” and did not mention the vocational school.

	<p>Many of the conscripts killed and wounded in the attack came from the country's south-western Samara region, according to governor Dmitry Azarov, who told families to call the local military offices for more information.</p> <p>An Orthodox commemorative service was held in the centre of Samara on Tuesday morning and flowers were laid at a Soviet-era war memorial in the city.</p> <p>On several social media groups used by locals in Samara, relatives of the conscripts were continuing to search for information about their whereabouts.</p> <p>"No one is picking up the phone at the enlistment office. How do I find out if my son is still alive," one woman wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 NYC nurses set to strike 9 Jan</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/03/nurses-strike-new-york-city-hospitals">https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/jan/03/nurses-strike-new-york-city-hospitals</a>
GIST	<p>At least 12,000 nurses at seven hospitals in <a href="#">New York</a> City are threatening to strike after their union contract expired at the end of last year. A strike date is set for 9 January.</p> <p>The nurses are pushing for the hospitals to implement and enforce safe staffing ratios, improve wages in line with inflation, and maintain health insurance coverage as opposed to proposed cuts by the hospitals.</p> <p>Nurses at BronxCare, Montefiore, Mount Sinai hospital, Mount Sinai Morningside and West, New York-Presbyterian and Richmond University medical center voted in favor of a strike authorization with 98.8% voting in support at the end of December 2022.</p> <p>Another 4,000 nurses at New York Presbyterian reached a tentative agreement on 1 January.</p> <p>Four additional hospitals, Interfaith medical center, Kingsbrook Jewish medical center, the Brooklyn hospital center, and Wyckoff Heights medical center, representing 1,200 nurses with the New York State Nurses Association are still in the process of voting but are expected to authorize a strike as well.</p> <p>"Hospital management are the ones that are causing the strike, not the nurses. We are ready to work, ready to negotiate in good faith. All they have to do is to give us a fair contract," said Nancy Hagans, NYSNA president and frontline nurse at Maimonides medical center. "You have some of the richest hospitals in the world where the CEOs are making \$10m a year. They are working through Zoom. We are here every day on a day-to-day basis putting our lives at risk at the height of the pandemic and yet they are telling us that pretty much they don't need us."</p> <p>Hagans said New York state had passed a bill to implement safe staffing ratios across the state in 2021, but the legislation <a href="#">is not yet being enforced</a>, meaning nurses have to do more with less staff and resources.</p> <p>"I've heard hospital administration saying that there's a shortage of nurses. It's not a shortage. They have failed to retain nurses and they're not just failing us, they are failing our patients, they are failing the community, because you cannot expect a nurse to take care of 10 patients instead of five. That is double the amount and the patient will suffer," added Hagans.</p> <p>Hagans described the stressful conditions that many nurses work under.</p> <p>"I don't think people know what it's like to work in an emergency room and walk in and lose a baby or a 19- or 20-year-old. We don't even have a minute to take a deep breath, we cannot even grieve the loss because we just have to go wipe our eyes with a tissue, wash our hands and go back to receive another trauma, and we can't even take a day off."</p> <p>Other striking nurses agree.</p>

“What we went through with Covid, that just decimated our workforce. We were severely understaffed before Covid hit, then Covid came, a lot of people left the profession, people retired early, everyone burnt out, people left to do different jobs outside of nursing and now we’re left with staffing shortages that are the all-time worst it’s ever been,” said Matt Allen, a registered nurse at Mount Sinai hospital.

He explained there were currently about 700 vacancies at his hospital, leaving nurses with increased workloads and high patient-to-staff ratios that have been detrimental to patient care.

“We’re not getting breaks, we can barely go to the bathroom, we can barely have a sip of coffee. But at the end of the day, who’s really suffering is the patient that’s not getting the care that they should be getting,” added Allen.

While nurses have been on the frontlines during the Covid-19 pandemic and [recent spikes](#) in flu and RSV cases, hospital executives in New York [received \\$73m](#) in bonuses in 2020, in addition to receiving [multimillion-dollar annual salaries](#) and [raising](#) costs of medical care at New York City hospitals.

Large hospitals around the US [made record profits](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic. After praising nurses as healthcare heroes in the beginning of the pandemic, understaffing and burnout has contributed to two-thirds of registered nurses planning to leave the profession in the next two years, according to a [2022 survey](#) by ShiftMed.

“We need more nurses hired. Now, not a year from now, not 10 years from now: now. That requires allocating nurses from schools and retaining the ones that are here now,” said Aretha Morgan, a pediatric ER nurse at New York-Presbyterian.

A spokesperson for Mount Sinai hospital said in an email: “Our goal is to reach an agreement that continues to provide our valued nurses with competitive compensation and benefits and ensures a safe, supportive working environment that enables them to provide exceptional care to all our patients across the diverse communities we serve.”

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 SPD staffing crisis: lost 500 officers in 3yrs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://mynorthwest.com/3767658/rantz-seattle-pd-lost-153-police-officers-2022-500-defunding/">https://mynorthwest.com/3767658/rantz-seattle-pd-lost-153-police-officers-2022-500-defunding/</a>
GIST	<p>The Seattle Police Department’s staffing crisis shows no end in sight. There were 153 separations in 2022, marking 509 officers leaving the force since the city council’s embrace of the defund movement. As a result, the department is now left with under 1,000 deployable officers, the lowest staffing seen in 30 years.</p> <p>There were 170 separations in 2021 and 186 in 2020, according to the Seattle Police Department, which did not confirm the 2022 data provided by the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG). Separations are an all-inclusive term that counts resignations, retirements, and terminations.</p> <p>Officers have been leaving the department in record numbers since 2020, when the city council defunded the police by 18% (though it promised to cut 50%). Council members demonized officers, stayed silent during physical attacks by Antifa and other agitators, and one council member, Teresa Mosqueda, <a href="#">even defended a man who threatened to murder cops</a>. Add to the mix a COVID vaccine mandate, a lack of contract, and Democrat reforms that favor criminals and officers had enough.</p> <p>As of December 31, 2022, there were only 966 deployable officers (with 91 listed as unavailable due to illness, extended time off, etc.), down from 2020’s 1,215 total deployable staff. The staffing crisis continues along with the city’s crime surge. In 2022, Seattle saw 57 homicides, up from 42 in 2020 and 52 in 2021 (which was a 26-year high).</p> <p>Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell said his goal was for the department to reach 1,400 police officers by 2027.</p>

But the goal is not possible. During the last budget debate, the Seattle City Council again quietly defunded the police department, [permanently cutting 80 police officer positions](#) with the support of council members Mosqueda, Lisa Herbold, Dan Strauss, Debora Juarez, and Andrew Lewis. Socialist council member Kshama Sawant voted no, in part, because there were not enough SPD cuts. The lone council members to stand up for the police were Sara Nelson and Alex Pedersen.

At the time, SPOG President Officer Mike Solan criticized the cut.

“The big picture is quite clear that we can’t recruit enough people to be cops in this city, mostly because of the political climate we still find ourselves in,” Solan explained on the Jason Rantz Show on KTTH. “And as I look at this in a broad perspective, in terms of the budget, I’m seeing more activist moves to take the money away from police and put it to projects that fulfill an activist talking point. For me, we need cops, and we need people that want to be cops. And we need to be given the confidence to go forth and conduct policing to hold criminals accountable. Because we’re seeing the decay of the city.”

Neither the Mayor’s office nor the SPD responded to requests for comment.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Putin preps Russians for long fight ahead</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/world/europe/putin-russia-ukraine-war.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/world/europe/putin-russia-ukraine-war.html</a>
GIST	<p>In footage <a href="#">released</a> by the Kremlin on New Year’s Eve, President Vladimir V. Putin is seen chatting with soldiers, exhorting them: “We can’t give up anything. We must only fight, only keep going.”</p> <p>He then adds: “Of course, there is still much that needs to be done.”</p> <p>As winter sets in and the one-year anniversary of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine looms next month, Mr. Putin has dropped his earlier efforts to shield the public from the pain of war and is now seeking to prepare Russians, and his own military, for a long fight ahead.</p> <p>“He’s gotten a lot less relaxed, a lot less optimistic,” said Tatiana Stanovaya, a Russian analyst who studies Mr. Putin for her political analysis firm R.Politik. “You can sense a certain anxiety, a desire to mobilize all possible forces to achieve his goals.”</p> <p>Keeping a low profile this week during Russia’s extended New Year’s holidays, Mr. Putin made no statement about Ukraine’s rocket attack in the city of Makiivka last weekend. The resulting torrent of criticism from pro-war bloggers on social media was aimed at Russian commanders and spared Mr. Putin himself, a pattern evident over months of blunders by Russia’s military.</p> <p>Russia’s Defense Ministry issued a statement on Tuesday saying that the death toll from the strike had reached 89 servicemen, including the deputy commander of the regiment. Ukrainian officials have said the toll is much higher. Neither claim could be independently confirmed. The statement also said that the main reason the site was able to be targeted was cellphone use by soldiers — a factor that Russian military bloggers had pinpointed as a vulnerability.</p> <p>A memorial service on Tuesday in the city of Samara, where many of the Makiivka victims were from, called for revenge against Ukraine, according to videos and local media reports. The reports did not mention any criticism of the officials responsible for the war.</p> <p>Still, the unusually quick response by the Russian Defense Ministry, which acknowledged mass casualties in Makiivka a day after the attack and promised to provide “all necessary help and support” to the families of the dead, showed that the Kremlin is seeking to become more transparent at home than it was in the early months of the war.</p>



It stood in contrast to the sinking last April of the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, the Moskva. The Kremlin has never acknowledged that it was hit by Ukrainian missiles, or updated the toll it cited of one sailor killed and 27 missing, frustrating family members of the crew.

For much of last year, Mr. Putin projected an air of confidence while allowing life inside Russia to [go on as normal](#). His compact with the public was straightforward: Leave the politics and the fighting to us, and you won't feel significant pain from our justified "special military operation" in Ukraine.

That ended in September, when Ukraine's counteroffensive stunned the Kremlin and Mr. Putin ordered a military draft that the war's hard-line supporters described as long overdue. Now, Mr. Putin is doubling down on his efforts to draw Russian society further into the war effort.

The new approach was on stark display on Saturday, when Mr. Putin broke with tradition and gave his widely watched New Year's Eve address not at the Kremlin, but at a military base, with people in uniform in the background.

The annual speech is typically heavy on apolitical platitudes — New Year's dinner table fare for millions of Russian families. This time Mr. Putin served up his narrative of a West bent on destroying Russia. "The West lied about peace while preparing for aggression," he said. "They are cynically using Ukraine and its people to weaken and divide Russia."

It was the latest, and perhaps most striking, instance of Mr. Putin trying to prepare Russians for a long war.

American officials have said [they see the Kremlin finally beginning to learn from its mistakes](#) on the battlefield. Russia is improving its defenses and pushing more soldiers to the front lines, and has put a single general in charge of the war who was able to organize a retreat from the Ukrainian city of Kherson with minimal casualties in November.

Russian commanders are also publicly reining in their ambitions. Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, the head of the Russian general staff, [said](#) on Dec. 22 that Russia's current focus was limited to trying to capture the rest of the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine.

"There's less triumphalism," Ruslan Leviev, a Russian military analyst for the Conflict Intelligence Team open-source analysis group, said in an interview. He said he was surprised by how quickly the Russian Defense Ministry had acknowledged the Makiivka losses, noting that the ministry usually takes days to admit large numbers of casualties — if it does so at all.

Mr. Putin himself appears to be putting a renewed focus on the home front: at once seeking to head off any potential discontent over the dire consequences of the war, and trying to mobilize Russians to more actively support it. In Russia, there are widespread rumors that Mr. Putin will soon order a new military draft to get more bodies to the front.

Western officials estimate that more than 100,000 Russian service members have been killed or wounded in the fighting, and the Russian Central Bank says the country's economy contracted 3 percent in 2022.

For now, though, the suffering brought to Russia by the war has not translated into widespread discontent. The economy has been more resilient to Western sanctions than many expected, while the Kremlin's television propaganda has been effective in helping convince many Russians that the invasion of Ukraine is, as Mr. Putin claims, a defensive war forced on Russia by the West.

While there was widespread outrage on social media over the deaths of Russian soldiers in Makiivka, there was little criticism inside Russia of Mr. Putin himself over the incident — and it went largely unmentioned on state television. Military bloggers said the high death toll could have been minimized if commanding officers had followed basic precautions, such as spreading out the recently arrived soldiers in safer locations, instead of clustering them near munitions.

At the memorial service in Samara, about 100 participants waved Russian flags and coordinated aid collection for survivors, according to videos and local media reports. Ukraine and the West were the targets of their outrage, not their own leaders.

“The entire West has closed ranks against us in order to destroy us,” Yekaterina Kolotovkina, the head of a soldiers’ humanitarian fund and the wife of a Russian general fighting in Ukraine, told the Samara rally, echoing a main theme of state propaganda.

On social media, initial calls by pro-war Russian commentators to charge officials responsible for the Makiivka losses with treason gave way to more guarded criticism of local military decisions and advice for avoiding future disasters. None appeared to direct criticism toward Mr. Putin, with veiled attacks more often aimed at his senior officials.

The instinct to spare Mr. Putin of blame was evident in a post by an influential Russian military blogger, Anastasia Kashevarova, a native of the Samara region, on Monday night. “Yes, Vladimir Vladimirovich, we love our country,” she wrote, referring to Mr. Putin. “I love Russia so much that I hate specific characters in your entourage.”

But some analysts believe that an outpouring of protest could still come. Mikhail Vinogradov, a Russian political scientist, noted that the public backlash to military casualties in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s “didn’t happen right away, not in the first year of the war.”

The fact that a public backlash against Mr. Putin inside Russia has yet to materialize could mean one of two things, Mr. Vinogradov said: either the political system is “maximally stable,” or feelings of frustration are gradually building up and “could one day lead to an energetic outburst.”

“Both hypotheses have a right to exist,” he said.

For the Kremlin, it is not only the war that could inject political volatility into this year. Russia’s next presidential election is scheduled for March 2024. While Mr. Putin would face no real electoral competition, the date has loomed large because analysts and members of the Russian elite have widely seen it as a moment by which Mr. Putin, 70, could make clear whom he wants to eventually succeed him.

Ms. Stanovaya, the analyst, said it was very likely that Mr. Putin would run again — constitutional changes made in 2020 allow him to stay in power until 2036. And she believes that tensions within two factions of the Russian elite — the hard-liners demanding an escalation of the war and the “pragmatists” seeking to avoid it — will only grow in the coming year.

“I think 2023 will be decisive to a certain degree, determining which way the balance will tip,” Ms. Stanovaya said. “We are at a kind of dangerous line.”

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HEADLINE	01/03 Monroe duck farm flock euthanized: bird flu
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/monroe-farm-avian-bird-flu-flock-euthanized/281-270d592d-ad27-4179-bc05-87d23d2972fd">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/monroe-farm-avian-bird-flu-flock-euthanized/281-270d592d-ad27-4179-bc05-87d23d2972fd</a>
GIST	<p>MONROE, Wash. — There is a lot of concern in Washington state about the avian flu, also known as bird flu. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife reports <a href="#">94 cases</a> were detected last year with most cases found in western Washington.</p> <p>When one bird is confirmed to have the flu, the whole flock has to be destroyed.</p> <p>The last five days have been some of the toughest for Elaine Kellner. She and her husband own <a href="#">Hearth and Haven Farm</a> in Monroe, which they started back in 2017 to bring pasture-raised duck eggs to western Washington.</p>

	<p>"We've worked for five years on this farm, it was always a dream to have this," said Kellner.</p> <p>Just days before Christmas, Kellner noticed a couple of their ducks had flu-like symptoms. So she reported it to the state's Department of Agriculture which tested the birds. On December 29th the tests revealed some of the ducks had contracted the avian flu, which means every bird on the farm, 170 ducks and four geese, was euthanized.</p> <p>"This just feels kind of like the final blow, I mean it really is, financially it's difficult to recover and emotionally it's difficult to recover. Knowing that, that this could happen again," said Kellner.</p> <p>State agriculture officials said that's the protocol to ensure the virus doesn't spread. Kellner says on top of that, the state is forcing her to wait 120 days before she can even consider repopulating birds on her farm. The USDA will give her a one-time payment, but Kellner said that's not enough to recoup her recent loss or the nearly five tons of feed which the state said she's not allowed to resell because of potential contamination.</p> <p>"We can't let anybody else go through this. We can't let any other farm go through this," said Kellner. "It's a terrible disease."</p> <p>Kellner believes the state and federal level needs to do more to support small farms when there's an Avian Flu case at their farms. She also thinks the state should consider a new approach to its protocol when it comes to Avian Flu cases.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Protestors decry opioid treatment facility</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/lynwood-protestors-city-council-opioid-treatment-facility-boys-and-girls-club/281-d0aa1bba-4f99-47dd-80e4-cc7203582bdd">https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/lynwood-protestors-city-council-opioid-treatment-facility-boys-and-girls-club/281-d0aa1bba-4f99-47dd-80e4-cc7203582bdd</a>
GIST	<p>LYNNWOOD, Wash. — Some people in Lynnwood are concerned about an opioid treatment facility that could soon open near a Boys and Girls club.</p> <p>The Lynnwood City Council met to discuss concerns over the treatment facility Tuesday night. Dozens of protestors packed the meeting, saying the location is an issue for the community as it's just feet away from the after-school program.</p> <p>"I live close to the proposed site within three minutes of walking. I have young kids and we go to the Boys and Girls club next door very often. Public safety for the kids is a top concern and there's no plan brought out by the state and city to protect the kids," said Vivil Dong.</p> <p>Acadia Health, one of the largest treatment centers in the county, is planning to relocate its Bothell facility to Lynnwood after the building was sold. Acadia said it currently has 100 patients within 5 minutes of the site in Lynnwood adding there is a need in the area, citing 18% of overdose deaths come from Snohomish County, a need the city doesn't dispute.</p> <p>"They're good but this is just the wrong place for it. If Lynnwood wants one or will have one and I think they should be, I'm thinking along highway 99 in a light industrial area," said George Hurst, Lynnwood City Council President.</p> <p>Acadia Health addressed safety concerns and said it hires security guards if needed. KING 5 checked in with Bothell Police to see if there have been any issues at the location there, police said they aren't often called to the clinic but said they suspect they do not get called for minor offenses so they don't scare people away who need help.</p> <p>The other issue: protestors and city council members felt left in the dark. The Department of Health is responsible for licensing the services the facility provides.</p>

	<p>Lynnwood City Council said it did not know about the proposed facility until DOH sent an email about a public hearing on Dec. 12. The hearing was scheduled for Dec. 29.</p> <p>“Many people found out in the middle of their Christmas vacation and held a public hearing on the 29th two days before the new year,” Dong said.</p> <p>Hurst said Acadia Health applied for a permit with the city in June and the council didn’t know about it but said the healthcare company should have done more outreach.</p> <p>“They knew they were coming here so why couldn’t they have done some education not only for the council but for the neighborhood so people wouldn’t be freaking out. Whether justified or not people are freaked out,” Hurst said.</p> <p>Opioid treatment centers are considered essential public facilities. The city council said by state law there’s nothing they can do to stop it.</p> <p>DOH said it can not make licensing decisions until Acadia has met with the city and the county. The city council said it will send recommendations to the DOH and meet on next steps.</p> <p>The facility however is scheduled to open at the end of January.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Mayor: Seattle on a ‘good trajectory’</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-spd-police-officers-recruitment-crime-homelessness-homeless-encampments-unhoused-gun-violence-public-safety-downtown-revitalization-tourism-travel-politics-city-government-washington-state#">https://komonews.com/news/local/seattle-mayor-bruce-harrell-spd-police-officers-recruitment-crime-homelessness-homeless-encampments-unhoused-gun-violence-public-safety-downtown-revitalization-tourism-travel-politics-city-government-washington-state#</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle Mayor Bruce Harrell says he won’t take a victory lap, but believes Seattle is on a “good trajectory” during his first year in office.</p> <p>Harrell is now entering year two in the top office in Washington’s largest city, and believes there has been progress in reducing crime, and homelessness. However, Seattle police data shows that crime has risen substantially in 2022, and shots fired calls are up 23%.</p> <p>“The data also has to be looked in the context of what’s happening in this country, in this state, and in this city,” said Harrell in the interview with KOMO Senior Reporter Chris Daniels. “The fact is we have a proliferation of guns in the wrong hands, we don’t have the policies in place federally or statewide to really address it to the level I would like to address it.”</p> <p>“While I acknowledge there are bad statistics that are not where we want to be, I have to acknowledge and ask the people to acknowledge this is a huge issue in this country and in this city,” said the mayor.</p> <p>Harrell believes his police recruiting strategy will help, which was approved in the last budget cycle by the City Council, and involves \$30,000 signing bonuses for new recruits. He also said in his first interview of the new year, that it is part of the homelessness response as well.</p> <p>“With our recruiting strategy, with our community-based strategy with our educational components, our parks strategy. We have a holistic approach to our public safety,” said Harrell. “If I’m going to be candid with, you as I know how to be, and I talk to my executive team about this, you tell me what we can do to clean up our streets right now. If its sustainable and it’s done constitutional, with compassion and with intelligence we will do that.”</p> <p>Harrell also complimented the council for backing his idea on moving parking enforcement back to Seattle police, as opposed to the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT).</p>

	<p>While he said it wasn't related to dilapidated recreational vehicles on city streets, Harrell said, "What you have seen is our strategy for safe lots, and through the regional homelessness authority, and make sure that RV's are not on the streets for longer than 72 hours. Not only moved but getting services as well. What we've heard throughout the city is they've seen a significant reduction and unwanted campers in neighborhood areas."</p> <p>On a lighter note, Harrell expressed optimism, despite data showing downtown activity down to 42% of pre-pandemic levels, of a bounce back.</p> <p>"Part of our strategy in 2023 will be to activate to look at the physical structures, bring in people, coffee corners where people can meet and greet each other," said Harrell.</p> <p>Seattle's mayor also expressed renewed hope about the city's role in the sporting landscape. The City was recently awarded the NHL's Winter Classic, and the Major League Baseball All Star Game.</p> <p>As far as the NBA and the Sonics, who left 15 years ago, Harrell said he has had recent discussions with "the people who are talking to (Adam Silver) that I talk to" and "People who are following very closely the discussions between the owners and players in the labor negotiations and discussions as late as last week, people coming in with finances to make something happen."</p> <p>"We think we're in pretty good shape here," continued Harrell. "I continue to be optimistic I think there are still some components in the NBA that are out of our control, particularly the labor negotiations I think once all that is settled – we're in great position so I'm optimistic."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 SFD: 1,500 encampment fires in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news-brief-newsletter/seattle-firefighters-responded-to-1500-fires-at-homeless-encampments-in-2022-fire-departement-washington-mayor-bruce-harrell-union#">https://komonews.com/news-brief-newsletter/seattle-firefighters-responded-to-1500-fires-at-homeless-encampments-in-2022-fire-departement-washington-mayor-bruce-harrell-union#</a>
GIST	<p>SEATTLE, Wash. — New data released Tuesday by the Seattle Fire Department shows the city's fire crews responded to 1,538 encampment fires during 2022, averaging 128 a month.</p> <p>The data reflects a slight increase from 2021, when Seattle Fire recorded 1,446 fires at encampments, and 854 in 2020.</p> <p>On Monday, KOMO News reported on an encampment fire in South Lake Union where wooden structures and tents burned.</p> <p>Seattle 911 data shows it was the fifth time an encampment fire had been reported on the block since August 2021.</p> <p>"I think the city needs to really take accountability," said John Marino, who lives near the encampment that burned. "They need to be responsible and clean this up immediately. We live here, we're concerned and by allowing this to continue it's getting worse."</p> <p>Members of the Seattle Fire Fighters Union IAFF Local 27 <a href="#">told city leadership last year</a> that firefighters were reporting being assaulted at encampment fires, including cases of being threatened with weapons. Mayor Bruce Harrell's office sent the following statement to KOMO News:</p> <p><i>"Mayor Harrell believes that firefighters do not need nor deserve additional threats to their wellbeing when they are trying to keep all neighbors safe. Mayor Harrell is continuing to address the homelessness crisis and public safety issues related to encampments with urgency. That is why the Unified Care Team, which includes representatives of the Seattle Fire Department, regularly meets to determine which encampments will be addressed next, considering City resource capacity and a variety of factors, including public safety incidents and verified SPD and SFD data, shelter availability, impact to public space and the natural environment, pedestrian access, pending construction, and more."</i></p>

*The mayor included a 50% increase in SFD's recruitment class in the budget to support firefighter wellbeing, capacity, and community safety. He will continue working with SFD and Local 27 to advance efforts to support firefighter safety at the local and state level. We will also continue working to improve and diversify public safety incident responses, creating alternatives that best match the appropriate services and behavioral health response to the issue at hand."*

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HEADLINE	01/03 Russian setbacks in Ukraine set tone 2023
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2023-01-03/russian-setbacks-in-ukraine-set-tone-for-2023">https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2023-01-03/russian-setbacks-in-ukraine-set-tone-for-2023</a>
GIST	<p>Military developments initiated by both sides in Ukraine during the waning days of 2022 have further damaged <a href="#">Russia's embattled offensive</a> and potentially <a href="#">set a tone for President Vladimir Putin</a> over the coming year.</p> <p>Ukraine announced early Tuesday that it had intercepted all of the Iranian-made attack drones that Russia had launched over the prior few days, beginning on New Year's Eve at a time Ukrainian families in Kyiv and elsewhere were gathering to celebrate the holiday. Its air force said it had defended against 45 of the Shahed-136 drones fired on Dec. 31. The Ukrainian General Staff initially confirmed intercepting another 39 on the first two days of January and reported again on Jan. 2 shooting down 27 of the drones.</p> <p>The news came amid a widely reported Ukrainian counterattack on Russian positions in eastern territory that Moscow considered safe, which perhaps accounts for why it clustered its forces into makeshift barracks there near a field artillery depot – all details that contributed to the rise in casualties. The strike, employing Western-supplied HIMARS rockets, killed more than 60 troops, the Kremlin confirmed. The rare admission of mass casualties almost certainly belies a much higher number, with Ukraine offering the likely inflated count of at least 400 Russian deaths and 300 injuries – while not explicitly claiming credit for orchestrating the strike.</p> <p>The exchanges follow an acceleration in Russian rocket and missile attacks against Ukrainian energy and civilian infrastructure in a planned attempt to degrade public support as the winter cold sets in. Moscow did not, however, appear to account for its devastating battlefield losses, nor of the effects of its tactics – namely broad entrenchment along territory it claims as its own – that <a href="#">Western officials consider outdated</a>.</p> <p>“Russia’s air and missile campaign against Ukraine is likely not generating the Kremlin’s desired information effects among Russia’s nationalists,” the independent Institute for the Study of War concluded in its latest analysis note.</p> <p>It observed that Russian military bloggers have stepped up criticisms of Putin’s military campaign, saying war planners bungled attempts to score propaganda wins with cruise missile strikes that employed poor targeting and did not follow through with sufficient volume.</p> <p>Indeed, the deputy chief of Ukraine’s intelligence directorate reported on Jan. 1 that he believes Russian forces only have enough cruise missiles for two or three more large-scale barrages.</p> <p>The Kremlin has appeared to acknowledge the growing domestic pressure it faces and has adopted a series of measures in an attempt to boost flagging public morale. Putin himself announced early Tuesday that he would ensure payments of the equivalent of nearly \$70,000 to the families of any Russian Guard, border patrol or special police troop killed while serving in or near parts of Russian-occupied Eastern Ukraine – an increase compared to prior military death benefits. He singled out the pro-Russian local forces whose support has become an essential component of the Kremlin’s strategy. The government will issue similar support to forces who become injured or sick while serving.</p> <p>It also offered to double the accrual rate for pensions for troops while they are serving in the warzone or receiving treatment for wounds inflicted there.</p>



	<p>Putin’s government has similarly attempted to shirk responsibility for its latest failings, the institute found. It cited statements from the Russian Ministry of Defense – the <a href="#">inherent failings of which</a> have bogged down a war that <a href="#">top leaders originally thought</a> would amount to a week-long thunder-run on Kyiv – that attempted to deflect blame for operational security onto the Kremlin-backed governments in Donetsk and Luhansk, the two oblasts that compose the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine that Russia first invaded in 2014.</p> <p>It also noted criticism from bloggers associated with Russia’s <a href="#">influential</a> Wagner Group private military company, which has played an outsized role in Russian foreign policy and particularly its war in Ukraine, that the Russian military could have done more to protect its clustered forces from the HIMARS attack.</p> <p>“Such profound military failures will continue to complicate Putin’s efforts to appease the Russian pro-war community and retain the dominant narrative in the domestic information space,” the institute concluded.</p> <p>Others who support Ukraine’s endeavors to fight back against Russian aggression have capitalized on the latest news to make bold predictions for the battlefield outcomes this year.</p> <p>“In 2023 Lithuania will continue its military support to Ukraine. It has to be the year when [Ukraine] defeats the aggressor,” Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda wrote on Twitter on Tuesday. He announced new forms of military equipment and aid his country plans to send to Ukraine while it continues to defend directly against other acts of aggression from Moscow, including threats to cut off energy flows into Europe.</p> <p>“Victory is close,” Nauseda predicted.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 China decries travelers Covid testing rules</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-03/china-fires-back-at-unacceptable-covid-19-testing-rules-for-travelers-threatens-countermeasures">https://www.usnews.com/news/health-news/articles/2023-01-03/china-fires-back-at-unacceptable-covid-19-testing-rules-for-travelers-threatens-countermeasures</a>
GIST	<p>Chinese officials are taking issue with the travel requirements adopted by several countries in the wake of China’s massive <a href="#">COVID-19</a> wave and threatening an unspecified response.</p> <p>“We believe that the entry restrictions adopted by some countries targeting China lack scientific basis, and some excessive practices are even more unacceptable,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said during a Tuesday briefing.</p> <p>“We are firmly opposed to attempts to manipulate the COVID measures for political purposes and will take countermeasures based on the principle of reciprocity,” Mao said.</p> <p>The remarks are the strongest pushback seen out of China since the restrictions began.</p> <p>Several countries have imposed testing requirements on travelers from China, including Canada, France, Spain, Japan and the United Kingdom.</p> <p>The U.S. cited a “lack of adequate and transparent epidemiological and viral genomic sequence data being reported from the PRC” for its negative testing <a href="#">requirement</a> for air travelers from China, which goes into effect this week.</p> <p>Other countries and groups including the World Health Organization have brought up similar concerns about China’s data.</p> <p>WHO officials met with Chinese officials on Friday and asked for “regular sharing of specific and real-time data on the epidemiological situation.”</p>

	<p>“WHO called on China to strengthen viral sequencing, clinical management, and impact assessment, and expressed willingness to provide support on these areas, as well as on risk communications on vaccination to counter hesitancy,” the organization said in a statement. “Chinese scientists are invited to engage more closely in WHO-led COVID-19 expert networks including the COVID-19 clinical management network.”</p> <p>The testing requirements for travelers from China come after the country relaxed its strict “zero COVID” policy and said that overseas travelers no longer need to quarantine upon arriving in China starting Jan. 8. But China is going through a massive COVID-19 surge that is believed to be widely underreported, spurring <a href="#">concerns</a> that the high level of transmission could lead to a new, more dangerous variant popping up.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Iran death sentences for young protesters</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/iran-upholds-death-sentences-for-teenage-protesters/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/iran-upholds-death-sentences-for-teenage-protesters/</a>
GIST	<p>Bloomberg News - Iran’s judiciary upheld death sentences for two male teenagers who had taken part in anti-government protests that have gripped the country since September.</p> <p>If the executions are carried out they will be the youngest people put to death since unrest erupted over Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who died in police custody in Tehran after being detained for allegedly flouting Islamic dress codes.</p> <p>The protests, dominated by young women and men, have become some of the biggest against Iran’s theocratic leadership since it took power after a revolution in 1979. An increasing crackdown by authorities has triggered international condemnation.</p> <p>Mehdi Mohammadifard, 18, has been sentenced to death on charges of “warring against God” and “corruption on earth,” the judiciary’s official website, Mizan Online, said on Tuesday. It said he had confessed to making a Molotov cocktail using a water bottle and petrol.</p> <p>Mohammad Boroughani, 19, has also had his death sentence confirmed, Mizan said on Monday, despite public pleas from his family and several rights groups including Amnesty International.</p> <p>It’s unclear whether they had lodged formal appeals against the sentences and Mizan said that Mohammadifard’s sentence can still be challenged or appealed in Iran’s supreme court.</p> <p>The death sentences of two others, 22-year-old Mohammad Mehdi Karami and Mohammad Hosseini, have also been upheld, the semi-official Fars news reported on Tuesday.</p> <p>The Islamic Republic has already hanged two 23-year-olds arrested in the protests. The Iran Human Rights group has identified 39 others who have either been officially sentenced to death or are at risk of capital punishment because of their charges.</p> <p>Rights groups have said at least 476 people have been killed by security forces, including 64 children, since the unrest started on Sept. 16.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Court: wearing MAGA hat protected speech</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/court-washington-teacher-wearing-maga-hat-fell-under-protected-speech/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/court-washington-teacher-wearing-maga-hat-fell-under-protected-speech/</a>
GIST	<p>VANCOUVER, Wash. — The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals has ruled in favor of a former teacher in Vancouver, concluding that his wearing a hat supporting former President Donald Trump to school was protected speech under the First Amendment.</p>

Court documents show that science teacher Eric Dodge brought the “Make America Great Again” baseball cap with him to an Evergreen Public Schools building twice before the 2019-20 school year, The Columbian reported. The first occasion was to a staff-only cultural sensitivity and racial bias training.

Wy’east Middle School Principal Caroline Garret allegedly told him to use better judgment. Dodge said that he was “verbally attacked” by Garret and other school employees after bringing the hat again and that the retaliation amounted to a violation of his First Amendment rights.

The appeals panel concluded in a Dec. 29 ruling that the district failed to show evidence of a “tangible disruption” to school operations necessary to outweigh the teacher’s First Amendment rights.

“That some may not like the political message being conveyed is par for the course and cannot itself be a basis for finding disruption of a kind that outweighs the speaker’s First Amendment rights,” Judge Danielle J. Forrest wrote in the opinion.

The country’s freedom of expression does have significant exceptions. “There is hate speech, there is threatening speech,” First Amendment expert and dean emeritus at the Lewis & Clark Law School, Stephen Kanter, told The Oregonian/OregonLive, “but a MAGA hat falls far short of that.”

The appeals panel also found that both the Evergreen Public Schools and chief human resources officer Janae Gomes did not take any improper administrative action against Dodge.

Neither Dodge nor Garrett could be reached for comment by The Oregonian/OregonLive.

Michael McFarland, a lawyer representing the school district and Gomes, said his clients are happy with the ruling.

Dodge resigned in 2020.

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HEADLINE	01/03 Seattle council confirms Diaz as police chief
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-city-council-confirms-diaz-as-police-chief/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/seattle-city-council-confirms-diaz-as-police-chief/</a>
GIST	<p>After 25 years with the Seattle Police Department, Adrian Diaz was officially confirmed as the department’s highest officer on Tuesday, as the City Council urged the new chief to focus on community-driven policing and embrace alternative approaches to public safety.</p> <p>Diaz was appointed to the permanent position in September by Mayor Bruce Harrell, after serving as interim for two years, citing the chief’s “intangible” qualities, like his “chemistry” with other city leaders.</p> <p>Members of the City Council confirmed that appointment in their first business meeting of the year, praising Diaz for his commitment to community policing and non-police public safety responses.</p> <p>“His emphasis on community engagement resulted in community members writing, calling and showing up to testify in support of his nomination,” said Councilmember Lisa Herbold, who chairs the Public Safety and Human Services Committee.</p> <p>Harrell advocated for and openly encouraged Diaz to fill the permanent seat since taking office last year, though the city’s charter required the mayor conduct a more open search for the position.</p> <p>The city hired a headhunting firm for \$75,000 to conduct a national search last spring and summer, which brought in 15 candidates. Diaz was selected over two other finalists — SPD Assistant Chief Eric Greening and Assistant Chief Kevin Hall of the Tucson Police Department in Arizona.</p>

After joining SPD in 1997, Diaz was promoted to assistant police chief in 2017 and deputy police chief in July 2020, a month before becoming interim police chief when Chief Carmen Best abruptly retired in the wake of police accountability protests and City Council members committing to cuts to the department.

In the time Diaz served as interim chief, the department faced a mass exodus of officers, increased public scrutiny and COVID-19-related challenges. Still, Diaz was optimistic about the direction of the department Tuesday, citing a 50% reduction in use of force since 2015, and increased intervention on fentanyl distribution and violent crime.

“It is such an honor to serve in this capacity,” Diaz said through tears at the council meeting.

Diaz has made violence reduction and an improved, fully staffed Police Department his top priorities, emphasizing in September the need for a “public safety approach” that includes increased civilian response, a maintained police budget and a “culture change” in the department.

As permanent police chief, Diaz will earn \$309,734, according to the offer letter signed by Harrell in September. In 2021, he earned \$265,017 as interim chief.

The council voted 8-1 to confirm Diaz as chief, which is required for mayoral appointments.

Councilmember Kshama Sawant voted against the appointment, noting it was similar to her previous votes against the director of the Office of Police Accountability and other positions she says are “responsible for overseeing the track record of police violence.”

Sawant said that “Seattle’s police accountability system is fundamentally broken,” calling on the chief to “radically overhaul” the department’s practices.

Councilmember Tammy Morales voted in favor of Diaz’s appointment, noting it is “the mayor’s prerogative to choose his Cabinet,” but called for Diaz to talk less about the department’s budget — which is higher than that of any other city department but often a focus of police lobbying to the council.

”It is your job to deliver on public safety for the people of Seattle and I look forward to your effective management of recruitment and retention strategies to make sure our staffing goals are met and that our community safety goals are met,” Morales said.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Hallucinogenic mushrooms legal in Oregon</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/legal-use-of-hallucinogenic-mushrooms-begins-in-oregon/">https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/legal-use-of-hallucinogenic-mushrooms-begins-in-oregon/</a>
GIST	<p>PORTLAND — The curriculum was set, the students were enrolled and Oregon officials had signed off on nearly every detail of training for the first class of “magic” mushroom facilitators seeking state certification.</p> <p>But as the four-day session got underway inside a hotel conference room in early December, an important pedagogical tool was missing: the mushrooms themselves.</p> <p>That’s because state officials, two years after Oregon voters narrowly approved the adult use of psilocybin, were still hammering out the regulatory framework for the production and sale of the tawny hallucinogenic fungi.</p> <p>Instead, the students, most of them seasoned mental health professionals, would have to role-play with one another using meditation or intensive breathing practices that could lead to altered states of consciousness — the next best thing to the kind of psychedelic trip they would encounter as licensed guides.</p> <p>Not that anyone was complaining.</p>

Like many of the two dozen students who paid nearly \$10,000 for the course, Jason Wright, 48, a hospital psychiatric nurse in Portland, said he was thrilled to be part of a bold experiment with national implications. “It’s incredible to be on the front lines of something that has the potential to change our relationship with drugs that should never have been criminalized in the first place,” he said.

On Sunday, Oregon became the first state in the nation to legalize the adult use of psilocybin, a naturally occurring psychedelic that has shown significant promise for treating severe depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and end-of-life anxiety among the terminally ill, among other mental health conditions.

Although scientists are still working to understand their therapeutic dynamics, psilocybin and other psychedelics are thought to promote neuroplasticity, a rewiring of the brain that gives patients fresh perspectives on long-standing psychiatric problems. One recent study on alcohol-use disorder, for example, found that two doses of psilocybin paired with talk therapy led to an 83% decline in heavy drinking among participants, and that nearly half of them had stopped drinking entirely by the end of the eight-month trial.

The long-term benefits, however, remain unclear.

Oregon’s Measure 109, as it’s called, authorized the creation of psilocybin service centers where anyone older than 21 can consume the mushrooms in a supervised setting. One key requirement is that a state-certified facilitator must be present during drug-induced journeys, which can last five to six hours.

Unlike cannabis, which can be sold at dispensaries, Oregon will not allow the retail sale of psilocybin; consumption must take place at a licensed service center.

For drug-reform supporters, Oregon’s approval of the measure is nothing short of revolutionary, a seismic policy shift they hope will inspire other states and municipalities — and persuade federal authorities to ease long-standing prohibitions.

Oregon voters also made history in 2020 by decisively voting to decriminalize the personal possession of small amounts of hard drugs such as heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine.

Although psilocybin and the other drugs remain illegal at the federal level — a regulatory clash that complicates the state’s headlong embrace of decriminalization — Oregon’s decision to overhaul its relationship with mind-altering compounds is already influencing other jurisdictions.

In November, Colorado voters approved a ballot measure that removes criminal penalties for possessing certain psychedelics; similar ballot measures and reform legislation have been introduced in New York, Washington and a dozen other states. Over the past three years, Washington, D.C., Seattle and a score of American cities have also moved to decriminalize psilocybin.

Mounting scientific interest in psychedelics has reached the highest levels of government. The Food and Drug Administration in 2018 granted psilocybin “breakthrough therapy” status for major depressive disorder, a designation that paved the way for clinical trials. Researchers say they expect full FDA approval in the coming year or two. Another drug with strong therapeutic potential, MDMA, or Ecstasy, is likely to win FDA approval even sooner for treating post-traumatic stress disorder.

“Psychedelic medicine is starting to transcend partisan politics in a way that few issues have,” said Sam Chapman, executive director of the Healing Advocacy Fund, a nonprofit organization that backed Measure 109 and has been working to guide its implementation. “It’s our responsibility to create a golden standard that’s worthy of wider implementation.”

Oregon’s experiment has not been without hiccups. The ballot measure’s passage created a backlash in rural, more-conservative parts of the state. A subsequent ballot measure in November resulted in 25 of the state’s 36 counties voting to opt out of the program for now.

The prolonged regulatory vacuum provided an opening for entrepreneurs who jumped the gun. In early December, police raided Shroom House, a retailer in Portland that the authorities said was illegally selling psilocybin mushrooms and drawing long lines of customers.

State officials say they are undaunted, even while acknowledging the gantlet of novel regulatory and logistical challenges. Psilocybin use is legal in a handful of countries, among them Brazil, Nepal and the Bahamas, but none have sought to create a system of supervised use.

Angela Allbee, a policy analyst at the Oregon Health Authority who oversees the state's psilocybin services section, said the process had been bumpy at times, in part because officials sought to maximize public participation through advisory panels, public hearings and meetings with law enforcement officials.

The biggest tensions erupted over the issue of affordability, given that psilocybin sessions will not be covered by insurance, at least as long as the federal government lists the drug as a Schedule 1 substance with "no currently accepted medical use."

A single session is likely to cost hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars.

One debate centered on whether to embrace a therapeutic model that would require more intensive, and costly, oversight by a psychotherapist, or a less rigorous approach that would allow anyone older than 21 to access the drug, with or without a mental health diagnosis, as long as trained facilitators were present during the session. Health officials opted for the latter, which they are calling a "non-directed" approach.

"Being the first in the nation means we have a responsibility to get this right, and that sometimes means learning on the fly," Allbee said.

There was a palpable sense of excitement as the inaugural cohort of students gathered at the Dossier Hotel in downtown Portland for a 160-hour course run by Fluence, an education and training consultancy that offers certification in the nascent field of psychedelic-assisted therapy.

"It feels like I'm dreaming," said Brian Pilecki, 43, a psychotherapist who was one of the instructors. "I never imagined this would happen in my lifetime."

The trainees included an ordained rabbi and clinical therapist who lives at an off-the-grid ranch near the town of Bend; a young psychiatrist disillusioned by the limitations of conventional psychotropic medications; and a trauma specialist who sheepishly described herself as a Christian fundamentalist shaped by a lifetime of anti-drug sentiment.

But the trauma therapist, Sherry Beckmann, 52, said her recent experience with deeply troubled war veterans persuaded her to reconsider that antipathy after some of her patients had breakthroughs after a hallucinogenic experience. "The patients don't lie," said Beckmann, who has come to see the drugs as "spiritual gifts" from God. "It's part of my own journey too. I mean I don't know why I'm here today other than trusting a gut feeling."

The certification programs are open to anyone with a high school diploma who has passed a background check. Licensure is limited to Oregon residents until 2025. But the Fluence program largely chose applicants with previous experience in the field of mental health — social workers, hospice nurses and psychiatrists.

The curriculum included significant emphasis on nontherapeutic matters, including Indigenous traditions involving hallucinogens, the negative social effects of U.S. drug policy and the impacts of systemic racism on marginalized populations.

Although psilocybin is widely considered safe and serious adverse reactions are rare, the practical aspects of the course sought to prepare facilitators for potentially difficult moments, including sexual arousal or intense emotional eruptions, especially among those with repressed trauma.



Nathan Howard, director of operations at InnerTrek, another training company approved by the state, said the company was especially interested in applicants with a quality known as equanimity, or the ability to maintain calm in difficult situations. “You are going to be sitting with people undergoing perhaps one of the most intimate, intense experiences of their lives,” he said. “You don’t want to direct the experience — you’re there to observe — but you also might need to hold their hand at certain moments.”

The first day of the Fluence course was largely devoted to self-reflection, with many students voicing frustration with the limitations of psychotropic drugs such as Xanax or Zoloft that are used to treat the symptoms of mental illness, not the underlying causes. Others spoke effusively about their own experiences with psychedelics.

At one point, an instructor asked the students to close their eyes, meditate and think about what brought them to the hotel conference room. Later, they broke into small groups to share personal stories about times in their life they felt oppressed or marginalized. They also spoke about the lack of diversity within their ranks, prompting a round of soul-searching about their role in promoting a therapy that, for the time being, will probably be available only to the privileged few.

But mostly there was elation that the long-awaited moment of legalized psychedelics had finally arrived. Wright said he had personally experienced the healing power of psychedelics and wanted his patients to experience those benefits as well.

The current model of psychiatric care, Wright said, revolves around calming down patients who show up at the emergency room in the throes of a psychotic or manic episode. He said the current roster of drugs were effective at stabilizing a patient, but many patients simply returned again because the precipitating trauma, anxiety or depression remained untreated. “I’m happy to be here,” he told the group, “so I can stop pushing ineffective drugs to my patients.”

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HEADLINE	01/04 China drone incursions ups ante to Japan
SOURCE	<a href="https://asiatimes.com/2023/01/china-drone-incursions-drop-a-gauntlet-on-japan/">https://asiatimes.com/2023/01/china-drone-incursions-drop-a-gauntlet-on-japan/</a>
GIST	<p>China is provocatively upping the ante of its drone operations over the contested East China Sea, bringing it into more frequent aerial confrontations with neighboring and remilitarizing Japan.</p> <p>This week, Japan’s Ministry of Defense (MOD) disclosed that Chinese WZ-7 surveillance unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) appeared over the East China Sea on January 1 and 2, prompting Japan to scramble its F-15J fighters in response, according to a The Warzone <a href="#">report</a>.</p> <p>China’s WZ-7s have a 23-meter wingspan, an operational ceiling of 18,000 meters and a cruise speed of 750 kilometers per hour, according to <a href="#">an Asia Military Review</a> article. The report speculated that the WZ-7 has a range of 7,000 kilometers while carrying a maximum payload of 650 kilograms.</p> <p>One WZ-7 flew into the East China Sea on January 1, passing between the Japanese islands of Okinawa and Miyakojima, according to the <a href="#">Japanese MOD</a> statement. After flying south of the Sakishima Islands, the UAV reversed course and flew between Okinawa and Miyakojima before returning to the East China Sea, the statement said.</p> <p><a href="#">Japan’s MOD</a> also said China’s Liaoning aircraft carrier passed through the Miyako Strait on the same day accompanied by the Anshan and Wuxi Type 055 cruisers, the Type 052D destroyer Chengdu, the Type 054A frigate Zaozhuang and the Type 901 fast combat support ship Hulunhu. On January 2, another WZ-7 flew an identical path as the previous day’s incursion, Japan’s MOD said in another <a href="#">statement</a>.</p> <p>At an operational level, the UAV deployments may aim to provide intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) support to China’s naval deployments off Okinawa and Miyakojima.</p>

[Asia Times previously reported](#) on China's December 2022 carrier battlegroup exercises in the same waters, led by the carrier Liaoning and escorted by the Type 055 cruiser Lhasa, Type 052D destroyer Kaifeng, Type 903 replenishment ship Taihu, and hull number 796 electronic reconnaissance vessel. The flotilla entered the Western Pacific on December 16, 2022, passing by Okinawa and through the Miyako Strait.

China's deployments may also aim to supplement carrier battlegroup deployments for power projection purposes. [In the 2019 book Unmanned Aircraft Systems in the Cyber Domain: Protecting USA's Advanced Air Assets](#), Randall Nichols and other writers note that the People's Liberation Army-Navy's (PLA-N) then-inventory of S-100, ASN-209, BZK-005 and GJ-1 UAVs was unable to launch from carriers, thus limiting them to land-based operations.

They noted that the Austrian-made S-100 rotorcraft drone is capable of vertical take-off and landing (VTOL), which allows it to operate from ship decks. They also noted that China has opted to launch UAVs instead from their occupied features in the South China Sea and military bases adjacent to the East China Sea.

However, China may now possess UAVs capable of operating from its carriers. [In June 2022, the South China Morning Post \(SCMP\) reported](#) that China's second carrier, Shandong, was spotted with fixed-wing UAVs on its flight deck during a scheduled maintenance refit.

[That same month, China's state mouthpiece Global Times](#) mentioned that the UAVs seen on the Shandong lack long-flight range capabilities but can still enhance the carrier and its battlegroup's situational awareness in search and reconnaissance missions.

Large UAVs like the WZ-7, on the other hand, can provide long-range maritime surveillance that China's carrier-based UAVs apparently still cannot.

The UAV flights may also be a response to Japan's new plan to deploy long-range missiles on the Nansei Archipelago, encompassing Okinawa, Miyakojima, and the Sakishima Islands. Moreover, China's recent UAV overflights may be reconnaissance missions to map out potential locations for missile batteries that can threaten Chinese warships in the waters.

Yet another possibility is that they aim to test and measure Japan's response to frequent incursions. [Asia Times previously reported](#) on China's aerial attrition strategy against Japan, which aims to inflict losses by forcing an unsustainable tempo of operations, resulting in miscalculation, accidents, accelerated aircraft wear and tear, pilot and ground crew fatigue, and strained maintenance and logistics.

At the strategic level, China's rising UAV deployments aim to strengthen its hand over Japan and Taiwan and gain information superiority over the US and its allies if conflict breaks out in the East China Sea.

[In a June 2020 article in the peer-reviewed International Journal of China Studies](#), Wonjune Hwang wrote that expendable and low-cost characteristics of UAVs such as the WZ-7 allow China to undertake more audacious ISR missions over disputed maritime territories. Hwang notes that similar previous tensions between China and Japan involving UAVs have set a precedent for sparking a more significant conflict.

He notes that the Japanese government announced in 2013 new rules of engagement whereby any UAV intruding into Japanese airspace would qualify as a target if it refused to leave. China responded in kind that any Japanese interception of its UAVs could be considered an act of war.

Hwang also notes that China uses UAVs to spy on Taiwan, including ISR missions on fixed and mobile targets. He also says that China could use UAVs to shadow US warships conducting patrols in the Taiwan Strait.

	<p>Most tellingly, Hwang cautions that China’s aggressive use of UAVs in the East China Sea could spur Japan and Taiwan to acquire their own long-range UAVs, conferring the same advantages but bringing the same risks of sparking escalation or a drone arms race.</p> <p><a href="#">In March 2022, Japan received the first of three RQ-4B Global Hawk UAVs</a>, which are roughly in the same long-range category as China’s WZ-7.</p> <p>Taiwan has also been developing UAVs for ISR and combat purposes. <a href="#">Asia Times previously reported</a> on Taiwan’s UAV projects, including the Teng Yun 2 armed UAV, Albatross and Cardinal ISR UAVs and Teng Yun and Chien Hsiang loitering munitions.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 California braces for more ‘brutal’ flooding</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/04/us/california-storm-flooding-wednesday-drought-climate/index.html">https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/04/us/california-storm-flooding-wednesday-drought-climate/index.html</a>
GIST	<p>Parts of drought-plagued California are <a href="#">facing an onslaught of powerful storms</a> to start the new year, bringing <a href="#">flooding rainfall</a> and even mud and debris flows to the state.</p> <p>The latest in the series of storms are expected to reach the coast Wednesday morning, and while the entire state will see impacts by the end of Thursday, Northern California and the Bay Area are likely to see the worst of the weather.</p> <p>A so-called “<a href="#">bomb cyclone</a>” over the Pacific Ocean – named because of how rapidly it intensifies over a short period of time – will sling a series of fronts at the West Coast. These fronts are being super-fueled with tropical moisture from a potent atmospheric river that stretches west to Hawaii.</p> <p>While the prolonged wet conditions will provide some relief to the drought conditions, the rain has proved <a href="#">too much too fast</a>.</p> <p>According to the National Weather Service, the storm could trigger more widespread flooding, roads washing out, hillside collapsing, fallen trees, major power outages, “immediate disruption to commerce, and the worst of all, likely loss of human life.”</p> <p>“This is truly a brutal system that we are looking at and needs to be taken seriously,” the NWS Bay Area office added.</p> <p>The storms are called “atmospheric rivers” because they are essentially a conveyor belt of concentrated moisture in the atmosphere emerging from the warm waters of the Pacific Ocean. A similar storm unleashed rains, deadly floods, debris flows and hurricane-force winds, particularly in Northern California including the Bay Area, over the weekend.</p> <p>It’s all happening against the backdrop of a yearslong, climate change-fueled megadrought that has drained the state’s reservoirs and triggered water shortages. These storms usher in much-needed rainfall and snow to the state. But Daniel Swain, climate scientist at the University of California in Los Angeles, said it is not enough to erase the decadeslong deficit that the unrelenting drought has built up.</p> <p>“This is really going to help a lot with the short-term drought in Northern California, perhaps even erase short-term drought conditions, but it’s going to take a lot more to completely obviate the longer term, multi-year drought impacts,” Swain said, emphasizing that Wednesday’s atmospheric event will be a “high-impact storm.”</p> <p>This dramatic swing in periods of drought and high precipitation, or weather whiplash, can occur more often and become more intense under a rapidly warming climate. And scientists say the chances of these sudden transitions happening in California will become much higher, if humans continue to pump out planet-warming gases.</p>

### **‘Two sides of the same coin’**

Climate researchers have said it’s a lack of precipitation, higher temperatures, and an increase in evaporative demand – also known as the “thirst of the atmosphere” – that has pushed the West’s drought into historic territory.

As wells run dry and reservoirs drain, Julie Kalansky, a climate scientist at Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego, said these storms are desperately needed more than ever to alleviate the drought, despite the hazards they bring in some areas.

“They’re two sides of the same coin: they can be extremely beneficial because they bring so much of California’s water supply to the state or they can also be drought busters,” Kalansky told CNN. “But when the duration becomes too long, they become too strong, they come back-to-back, and the landscape doesn’t get an opportunity to absorb all the rain, it can lead to this flooding.”

This winter is already showing some signs of respite for a state that’s still almost entirely in drought conditions. Large reservoirs in Northern California including lakes Shasta and Oroville, are slowly being replenished. Meanwhile, smaller reservoirs like Folsom Dam saw an increase of roughly 40 feet of water in three days.

Swain said the storms will have largely improved dry conditions in Northern California in the short term. But in the long term, he said climate change has already made its mark and that it would take a lot more than one exceptionally wet year – it will take consecutive wet years and cooler conditions to bust this drought.

“In a warming climate, the severity of droughts in places like the Southwest and California are being driven by increasing evaporative demand,” he said. “Essentially, the atmosphere is requiring more water as temperatures rise, so you’d actually need more precipitation than you used to have to balance that out — and we’re not necessarily seeing more precipitation than we used to.”

### **Persistent drought with periods of excessive rain**

An average atmospheric river carries more than 20 times the water the Mississippi River does, but as vapor. California is prone to floods from these storms as they come ripping off the Pacific Ocean, and major floods from them have happened before — but climate change is raising the stakes with millions of people likely to be impacted.

Rainfall in parts of California exceeded 8 inches over the weekend as the last storm moved across the state. Oakland saw its wettest day on record on December 31 when 4.75 inches of rain fell, and San Francisco marked its second-wettest day with 5.46 inches – nearly half of its typical December rain.

A 2022 study authored by Swain found that climate change has already [doubled the chances of a disastrous megaflood](#) happening in California in the next four decades – a storm unlike anything anyone alive today has ever experienced.

And while the recent series of storms isn’t the “big one” yet, the study paints a picture of what the state could face as the planet warms.

“We haven’t seen the mega floods, but we have definitely seen hints of increasingly extreme precipitation even in the middle of what has otherwise been a period characterized by a pretty severe and persistent drought,” Swain said.

Yet despite this wet start to the year, it’s worth noting that last year was relatively much wetter around this time — and the state was still mired in drought for the remainder of 2022.

“The face of droughts is changing,” Swain said. “It’s easier and easier to get into a drought – even following a really wet winter – because we just have that growing evaporative demand and hotter summers.”

	“Multi-year droughts are going to look different than they used to,” he said.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 US reopens visa, consular services in Cuba</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-reopening-visa-consular-services-embassy-cuba-96166860">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-reopening-visa-consular-services-embassy-cuba-96166860</a>
GIST	<p>HAVANA -- The United States Embassy in Cuba is reopening visa and consular services Wednesday, the first time it has done so since a spate of unexplained health incidents among diplomatic staff in 2017 slashed the American presence in Havana.</p> <p>The Embassy confirmed this week it will begin processing immigrant visas, with a priority placed on permits to reunite Cubans with family in the U.S., and others like the diversity visa lottery.</p> <p>The resumption comes amid the greatest migratory flight from Cuba in decades, which has placed pressure on the Biden administration to open more legal pathways to Cubans and start a dialogue with the Cuban government, despite a historically tense relationship.</p> <p>They are anticipated to give out at least 20,000 visas a year, though it's just a drop in the bucket of the migratory tide, which is fueled by intensifying economic and political crises on the island.</p> <p>In late December, U.S. authorities reported stopping Cubans 34,675 times along the Mexico border in November, up 21% from 28,848 times in October.</p> <p>Month-to-month, that number has gradually risen. Cubans are now the second-largest nationality after Mexicans appearing on the border, U.S. Customs and Border Protection data shows.</p> <p>The growing migration is due to a complex array of factors, including economic, energy and political crises, as well deep discontent among Cubans.</p> <p>While the vast majority of Cuban migrants head to the U.S. via flights to Nicaragua and cross by land at the U.S. border with Mexico, thousands more have also taken a dangerous voyage by sea. They travel 90 miles to the Florida coast, often arriving in rickety, precariously constructed boats packed with migrants.</p> <p>The exodus from Cuba is also compounded by rising migration to the U.S. from other countries like Haiti and Venezuela, forcing the U.S. government to grapple with a growingly complex situation on its southern border.</p> <p>The renewal of visa work at the embassy comes after a series of migration talks and visits by U.S. officials to Havana in recent months, and may also be the sign of a slow thawing between the two governments.</p> <p>“Engaging in these talks underscores our commitment to pursuing constructive discussions with the government of Cuba where appropriate to advance U.S. interests,” the U.S. Embassy said in a statement in November following an American delegation's visit to Cuba.</p> <p>The small steps are far cry from relations under President Barack Obama, who eased many American Cold War-era sanctions during his time in office and made a historic visit to the island in 2016.</p> <p>Visa and consular services were closed on the island in 2017 after embassy staff were afflicted in a series of health incidents, alleged sonic attacks that remain largely unexplained.</p> <p>As a result, many Cubans who wanted to legally migrate to the U.S. have had to fly to places like Guyana to do so before migrating or reuniting with family.</p>

	<p>While relations have always been tense between Cuba and the U.S., they were heightened following the embassy closure and the Trump administration's tightening of sanctions on Cuba.</p> <p>Under President Joe Biden, the U.S. has eased some restrictions on things like remittances and family travel from Miami to Cuba, but has fallen short of hopes by many in Cuba that a Biden presidency would return the island to its “Obama era.”</p> <p>Restrictions on tourist travel to Cuba, and imports and exports of many goods, remain in place.</p> <p>Also kindling tensions has been the Cuban government’s harsh treatment of participants in the island’s 2021 protests, including hefty prison sentences doled out to minors, a constant point of criticism by the Biden administration.</p> <p>Cuban officials have repeatedly expressed optimism about talks with the U.S. and steps to reopen visa services. Cuban Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Carlos Cossio said in November that ensuring migration through safe and legal pathways is a “mutual objective” by both countries.</p> <p>But Cossio also blamed the flight of tens of thousands from the island on U.S. sanctions, saying that “there's no doubt that a policy meant to depress the living standards of a population is a direct driver of migration.”</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/04 Japan PM vows deeper US defense alliance</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japans-pm-kishida-vows-deeper-alliance-us-defense-96171590">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/japans-pm-kishida-vows-deeper-alliance-us-defense-96171590</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>TOKYO -- Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida on Wednesday pledged to deepen his country's alliance with the United States under Japan's new defense policy that breaks from its exclusively self-defense-only stance in the face of growing regional tensions.</p> <p>Kishida, speaking in a news conference after visiting Ise Shrine in central Japan, said he will visit Washington for talks with President Joe Biden to underscore the strength of the Japan-U.S. alliance and highlight closer cooperation between the countries under Japan's new security and defense strategies adopted last month.</p> <p>The U.S. visit is part of Kishida's upcoming trip to most of the Group of Seven countries beginning Monday. Japan will host this year's G-7 summit in Hiroshima. Kishida said his meeting with Biden will be “very important” and “more significant than showing my face as G-7 president.”</p> <p>“We will show to the rest of the world an even stronger Japan-U.S. alliance, which is a lynchpin of Japanese security and diplomacy,” Kishida said. “We will also show our further cooperation toward achieving a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific.’”</p> <p>Japan, under the new security and defense plans, is purchasing hundreds of U.S.-developed Tomahawks and other long-range cruise missiles to preempt possible attacks and also building up defenses in southwestern Japan amid growing worries of a Taiwan emergency. Japanese media said the U.S. and Japan are expected to discuss how they would cooperate in the event of a conflict over Taiwan.</p> <p>Earlier Wednesday, the White House announced that Biden will host Kishida for economic and security consultations on Jan. 13.</p> <p>Biden and Kishida are expected to discuss North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missile programs, amid concerns over the potential for another nuclear test by the reclusive nation, as well as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, stability across the Taiwan Strait, climate change and economic issues, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said.</p>



<a href="#">Return to Top</a>	<p>The two leaders last met in Bali, Indonesia, during November's Group of 20 summit.</p> <p>Kishida will also visit France, Italy, Britain and Canada to meet their leaders during his Jan. 9-15 trip, according to Japan's Foreign Ministry.</p> <p>Kishida on Wednesday also vowed to tackle Japan's dire problem of declining births, while pushing his "new capitalism" policy that he said will generate a "virtuous cycle of growth and distribution of wealth" to achieve a steady increase in salaries that have stalled for decades.</p> <p>The number of babies born in Japan last year is expected to fall to a new record below 800,000 as part of a steady decline that is seen as eroding national strength.</p> <p>"We cannot wait any longer," Kishida said. "From an economic perspective, we also need to allay the concerns of those saying they cannot invest in Japan because it's shrinking from declining births."</p> <p>Kishida said the government will do more to expand support for childcare and reduce gender gaps in salaries and working environments to lower barriers for women.</p> <p>Japan is the world's third-biggest economy but living costs are high and wage increases have been slow. The conservative government has lagged in making society more inclusive for children, women and minorities.</p> <p>So far, the government's efforts to encourage people to have more babies has had limited impact despite introducing subsidy payments for pregnancy, childbirth and child care.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/04 Ukraine spy chief: deep strikes into Russia
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/expect-strikes-deeper-deeper-russia-ukraines-spy-chief/story?id=96127220">https://abcnews.go.com/International/expect-strikes-deeper-deeper-russia-ukraines-spy-chief/story?id=96127220</a>
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- There will likely be further strikes into <a href="#">Russian</a> territory, <a href="#">Ukraine's</a> military intelligence head, Kyrilo Budanov, told ABC News in an interview from Kyiv, without specifically saying whether Ukraine would be behind them.</p> <p>Ukraine has not claimed <a href="#">responsibility for the Dec. 26 attack</a> on Russia's Engels Air Force Base, which is located more than 800 miles from the Ukrainian border, but Budanov admitted he was "glad to see it."</p> <p>He added the attacks would come "deeper and deeper" inside of Russia, but would only be able to comment on his country's responsibility for the attacks after the war was over.</p> <p>And when asked about attacks on Crimea, which was <a href="#">illegally annexed</a> by Russia in 2014, Budanov said, "Crimea is Ukrainian territory, we can use any weapon on our territory."</p> <p>In late December, Budanov made a public appearance in Bakhmut in Donetsk, the hottest point of the 800-mile front line. What he saw shocked him.</p> <p>"Soldiers showed me a section where dead bodies are piled up like something you would see in a movie," he said.</p> <p>"There are hundreds of dead bodies just rotting away in the open field, in places they are piled on top of other bodies like makeshift walls, when Russian troops attack on that field they use those bodies for cover, like a shield," he continued. "But it's not working. There are actual fields of dead bodies there."</p> <p>Budanov said Russia's weaponry is depleting, forcing it to resort to "cheaper," more "plentiful" solutions, like the <a href="#">Iranian-made, self-destructing Shahed drones</a>, which have sowed fear and panic in the population.</p>

Tehran denies supplying drones to Russia, though the U.S. Department of Defense said Russia has bought hundreds of them.

Russia fired 84 drones at Ukraine in the first two days of 2023, all of which were shot down by Ukrainian air defenses.

The U.S. announced it would [supply a Patriot missile defense system](#) to Ukraine in late December, bringing the Biden administration's total military aid for Ukraine close to \$22 billion. President Joe Biden [recently signed](#) a \$1.7 trillion government funding bill that includes \$47 billion of additional aid for Ukraine.

"I want to express gratitude for all the help we had, and ask to continue to support Ukraine," said Budanov, telling U.S. citizens, "I promise it will not take too long now, and every taxpayer in the U.S. will be able to see where every cent went. We will change this world together."

Budanov also said they are expecting U.S. Bradley Armored Fighting vehicles to be sent to Ukraine soon: "We are waiting for them. We're looking forward to them very much. This will significantly improve the combat ability of our units."

Budanov said he expects fighting to be the "hottest" in March, adding that Ukraine is planning a major push in the spring.

"This is [when we will see more] liberation of territories and dealing the final defeats to the Russian Federation," he said. "This will happen throughout Ukraine, from Crimea to the Donbas."

The Ukrainian leadership has repeatedly said it will not give up an inch of territory.

"Our goal, and we will achieve it, is returning to the borders of 1991, like Ukraine is recognized by all subjects of international law," said Budanov.

As for the future of Russia, Budanov said there are several scenarios in play, but the message is clear: "You should not be afraid of the transformation of Russia. It will only benefit the whole world."

Putin's regime "is a laughingstock for everyone," Budanov said, adding the Russian troops are all but reduced to defending territories they still occupy within Ukraine -- "and not for much longer."

"Russia is not a military threat to the world anymore, just a tall tale," he added.

The only issue remaining, Budanov said, is Russia's nuclear arsenal "and the uncontrollable regime" that will lead "the whole world to realize the necessity of Russia's denuclearization or at least an international overseeing of its nuclear arsenal."

"A terrorist country swinging a nuclear bat at everyone and spewing threats is not a regime that has an ethical or political right to be in control of weapons of mass destruction," Budanov added.

Moments after the interview ended, Budanov warned our team that rockets had been fired at Kyiv from the Black Sea. Hours later, Russia [unleashed another massive aerial attack](#) against Ukraine -- ringing in 2023 with terror.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Ukraine offers a hotline to surrender</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/ukraine-offers-russian-soldiers-hotline-surrender/story?id=95918999">https://abcnews.go.com/International/ukraine-offers-russian-soldiers-hotline-surrender/story?id=95918999</a>
GIST	KYIV, Ukraine -- More than a million Russians have called, texted or visited the website of a Ukrainian hotline that allows them to surrender, with many seeking a way to avoid going to war, since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, according to the hotline.

The hotline, which is run by the “I Want to Live” project, has received about 200 to 300 daily calls since September, said Vitaliy Matvienko, the project’s spokesperson. Instead of calling, some Russians choose to send encrypted messages via Telegram. Altogether, more than 4,000 people have submitted requests to surrender, he said.

“We saw that there are many Russians who do not want to fight,” Matvienko said. “Their numbers skyrocketed after Putin announced mobilization in Russia, while Ukrainian Armed Forces liberated vast territories in the Kharkiv region in a fulminant counteroffensive.”

Matvienko’s has a face that’s well-known to many Russians, because he acted in a few Russian TV series before the war. That’s why he was offered the role of spokesman of the “I Want to Live” project. Ukrainian officials said Russians who are considering crossing the frontline might want to see someone familiar they can trust on the other side.

The hotline is now functioning in a secure secret facility which many officials and military staffers aren’t allowed to enter. The operators use only computers, headphones and special software to accept and record the calls.

“Many of those who call are scared, they want to know whether this project is real and how it is possible for a Russian soldier to escape from the army. There were some prank calls, but most are real” said Oksana, one of the employees receiving calls on the hotline, whose name has been changed for security reasons.

ABC News reviewed a recording of one of Oksana’s calls, which came from a woman in occupied Crimea.

The woman sounds like she’s almost in tears as she says her son received a summons to the army at a police checkpoint. The woman asks what she could do. The operator’s advice was to call the hotline once her son was in Ukraine controlled territory. Then they could assess whether he might be able to surrender.

Ukrainian authorities have not fully disclosed the details of the surrender procedure, as well as the number of Russians who have actually surrendered, but some offered ABC News a glimpse of how it works.

People first call the numbers mentioned on the project’s web site or text a chatbot. The operators record people’s personal info, then pass it to the relevant state bodies and special military units. Later the operator gives instructions to a potential defector -- where he or she should come and what to do upon arrival.

At the agreed-upon time, the soldier has to come to the Ukrainian Armed Forces’ positions and establish visual contact with a drone, which will show the safe passage route.

The Russians who follow the surrender rules are legally considered prisoners of war, Ukrainian authorities said. That status guarantees they are treated according to the Geneva conventions and they can receive necessary medical treatment and food. They can also call their relatives.

“Now it’s just a routine job for me, but the first hundred of calls were tough for me, because as a patriot of Ukraine I hate those who reached out,” Oksana said.

Among those callers were Ukrainian citizens who betrayed their country and fought on the Russian side, she said.

The hotline has also fielded calls from people with “passports” from the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk people’s republics, ordinary Russians who were recently called up to fight and senior commanders who do not see their future in Russia, Matvienko said.

High-level military personnel are treated as a priority, as they may possess valuable intelligence.

	<p>Sergiy Kuzan, head of the Ukrainian center for security and cooperation, said each case is evaluated differently, taking into account the individual's age, origin and military experience. The project also evaluates people based on the region where they're surrendering, on their education level and how the person was captured, if they were.</p> <p>"There were cases when a person was really so 'zombified' by Russian television that they really believed in the junta, in Nazism in Kyiv," Kuzan said. "That is, there are clinical cases I would say. For such people we turn on our television, let them read our newspapers, and then people need a little time to realize what is actually going on."</p> <p>Leaders of the project said they expect to continue expanding, with plans for a separate program in Ukraine and abroad for members of Russia's officer corps who are seeking to surrender.</p> <p>Ukrainian officials said they're busy putting together a new program for high-level defectors, some of whom will be given new identifies and backgrounds. That programs will be implemented on a case-by-case basis, officials said.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/04 Russia: phones aided Ukraine targeting</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-phone-allowed-ukraine-target-troops-96169846">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/russia-phone-allowed-ukraine-target-troops-96169846</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>KYIV, Ukraine -- Unauthorized use of cell phones by Russian soldiers led to a deadly Ukrainian rocket attack on the facility where they were stationed, the Russian military said late Tuesday, raising the death toll from the weekend attack to 89.</p> <p>Gen. Lt. Sergei Sevryukov said in a statement that phone signals allowed Kyiv's forces to "determine the coordinates of the location of military personnel" and launch a strike. Sevryukov said unspecified measures were being taken to "prevent similar tragic incidents in the future" and promised to punish officials responsible for the infraction.</p> <p>The attack, one of the deadliest on the Kremlin's forces since the start of the war over 10 months ago, occurred one minute into the new year, according to Sevryukov.</p> <p>Ukrainian forces fired six rockets from a U.S.-provided HIMARS multiple launch system at a building "in the area of Makiivka" where the soldiers were stationed. Two rockets were downed but four hit the building and detonated, prompting the collapse of the structure. The Russian Defense Ministry initially said the strike killed 63 troops. But as emergency crews sifted through the rubble of the building, the death toll has grown to 89, Sevryukov said on Tuesday. The regiment's deputy commander was among the dead.</p> <p>Other, unconfirmed reports put the death toll much higher.</p> <p>The Strategic Communications Directorate of Ukraine's armed forces claimed Sunday that around 400 mobilized Russian soldiers were killed in a vocational school building in Makiivka and about 300 more were wounded. That claim couldn't be independently verified. The Russian statement said the strike occurred "in the area of Makiivka" and didn't mention the vocational school.</p> <p>The attack marked yet another setback for the Kremlin's bogged-down war effort in Ukraine, undermined by a successful Ukrainian counteroffensive. It stirred renewed criticism inside Russia of the way the war is being conducted.</p> <p>Unconfirmed reports in Russian-language media said the victims were mobilized reservists from the region.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/02 Iran vows vengeance for general's death</b>
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SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-government-iraq-qassim-soleimani-3353602bd30e683afec45d8c78196886">https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-government-iraq-qassim-soleimani-3353602bd30e683afec45d8c78196886</a>
GIST	<p>DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran’s president on Tuesday vowed to avenge the killing of the country’s top general on the third anniversary of his death, as the government rallied its supporters in mourning amid months of anti-government protests.</p> <p>Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the architect of Iran’s regional military activities, was killed in a U.S. drone strike in neighboring Iraq. He is hailed as a national icon among supporters of Iran’s theocracy, while the protesters have torn down billboards and defaced other images of him.</p> <p>Addressing a ceremony marking the general’s death, President Ebrahim Raisi said those behind it “should know that retaliation is obvious,” adding that “there will be no relief for murderers and accomplices.”</p> <p>He said Soleimani had defeated “U.S. hegemony” and praised him for his role in leading Iran-backed forces against the Islamic State extremist group. Soleimani was also mourned in neighboring Iraq alongside Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, an Iraqi militia leader killed in the same strike. Iranian-backed militias make up the bulk of Iraq’s state-supported Popular Mobilization Forces.</p> <p>Iran responded to the killing of Soleimani by launching a barrage of missiles at U.S. bases in Iraq, causing dozens of brain concussion injuries but no deaths among U.S. soldiers stationed there. Iranian officials have repeatedly vowed to take further steps and imposed sanctions on individuals accused of taking part in the operation.</p> <p>On Monday, Iran’s state-linked Jam Jam newspaper published the names and photos of 51 Americans it said were involved in the strike and were “under the shadow of retaliation.” The list included several current and former senior U.S. civilian and military officials as well as individuals who appeared to be soldiers involved in aircraft maintenance at regional bases.</p> <p>Raisi accused the U.S. of waging a “hybrid war” against Iran, referring to the protests. Iranian officials have accused the U.S. and other foreign powers of fomenting the latest unrest in the country, without providing evidence.</p> <p>Iran’s judiciary said Tuesday that it had indicted two French nationals and a Belgian, without providing further details. Iran is holding a number of foreigners and dual nationals on charges of endangering national security or taking part in protests. Rights groups accuse Iran of denying them due process and using them as bargaining chips with the West, something Iranian officials deny.</p> <p>The protests, which were ignited by the death of a young woman in mid-September who was being held by Iran’s morality police for allegedly violating the country’s strict Islamic dress code, <a href="#">quickly spread across the country</a> and show no sign of letting up.</p> <p>The demonstrators say they are fed up with decades of social and political repression and are calling for the overthrow of the ruling clerics. The protests mark one of the biggest challenges to Iran’s theocracy since the 1979 revolution that brought it to power, and rights groups say security forces have used live fire, bird shot and tear gas to disperse them.</p> <p>At least 516 protesters have been killed and over 19,000 people have been arrested, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that has closely monitored the unrest. Iranian authorities have not provided an official count of those killed or detained.</p> <p>The semiofficial Tasnim news agency reported that a member of the Revolutionary Guard was gunned down on Tuesday outside his home. It did not report a motive but said the man had been active in the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard and the Basij militia, <a href="#">which has been spearheading the violent crackdown on the protests</a>.</p>

Soleimani, who led the elite Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, was credited with helping to arm, train and lead armed groups across the region, including the Shiite militias in Iraq, the Lebanese Hezbollah, and fighters in Syria, the Palestinian territories and Yemen. The U.S. held him responsible for the deaths of many of its soldiers in Iraq. Within Iran, Soleimani is closely associated with an Islamic theocracy that the protesters view as violent and corrupt.

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## Cyber, Tech Awareness

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HEADLINE	01/03 Cyberattack disrupts L.A. housing authority
SOURCE	<a href="https://therecord.media/los-angeles-housing-authority-says-cyberattack-disrupting-systems/">https://therecord.media/los-angeles-housing-authority-says-cyberattack-disrupting-systems/</a>
GIST	<p>The Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) has confirmed that it is dealing with a cyberattack after the agency appeared on the leak site of the LockBit ransomware group.</p> <p>A spokesperson for the agency told The Record on Monday that it is working with cybersecurity experts and will try to continue operations while the issue gets resolved.</p> <p>“We are working diligently with third-party specialists to investigate the source of this disruption, confirm its impact on our systems, and to restore full functionality securely to our environment as soon as possible,” a spokesperson said.</p> <p>HACLA is one of the nation's largest and oldest public housing authorities. The agency has an annual budget of more than \$1 billion and provides housing to more than 19,000 families in the city.</p> <p>This is the second major cyberattack on a L.A. agency after the Los Angeles Unified School District <a href="#">was attacked in September</a>. The attack drew the attention of the White House because LAUSD is the second-largest school district in the country, and both the FBI and Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency <a href="#">were involved in response efforts</a>.</p> <p>On December 31, the LockBit ransomware group said it stole 15 TB of data and gave HACLA a deadline of January 12 to pay an undisclosed ransom.</p> <p>LockBit has targeted housing authorities in the past. The gang claimed it attacked the <a href="#">Chattanooga Housing Authority</a> in November, but the attack was never confirmed by city officials, and the Indianapolis Housing Agency dealt with its <a href="#">own ransomware attack in October</a>.</p> <p>Ransomware groups have <a href="#">made a point</a> of going after poorly-resourced local governments across the United States in 2022, targeting small governments in <a href="#">New Jersey</a>, <a href="#">Colorado</a>, <a href="#">Oregon</a>, <a href="#">New York</a> and several other states.</p> <p>LockBit has become one of the most prolific cybercriminal gangs operating in recent months, attacking dozens of <a href="#">government agencies</a>, <a href="#">hospitals</a> and <a href="#">businesses</a> across the world.</p> <p>Researchers <a href="#">have linked more than 1,029 attacks</a> to LockBit since the group began its operation.</p>
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HEADLINE	01/04 Volvo Cars stolen data for sale?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.securityweek.com/hacker-selling-data-allegedly-stolen-volvo-cars-following-ransomware-attack">https://www.securityweek.com/hacker-selling-data-allegedly-stolen-volvo-cars-following-ransomware-attack</a>
GIST	<p>A hacker is offering to sell data allegedly stolen from Swedish vehicle manufacturer Volvo Cars following a ransomware attack carried out in late December.</p> <p>The data was put up for sale on a public hacker forum on December 31. The seller claims Volvo Cars was the target of a new ransomware operation called Endurance, which emerged in November 2022, when its</p>



operators claimed to have obtained data associated with many US government agencies. Those claims were disputed at the time, with some users pointing out that the leaked sample documents were already public.

As for the alleged Volvo Cars hack, the seller said a ransom payment was not demanded because they assume the victim will not pay up.

The Volvo data offered for sale — for the price of \$2,500 in Monero cryptocurrency — allegedly includes information on existing and future vehicle models, databases, development systems, and employee information.

If confirmed, this would be the second time Volvo Cars has been breached in recent years. In December 2021, the company admitted that [hackers had stolen R&D data](#) from its systems, but said it had not been hit by ransomware and that there was no impact on the safety or security of customer cars or their personal data. However, a ransomware group did take credit for the attack at the time.

The individual offering to sell stolen information now claims the data is “completely separate from the 2021 breach”.

Screenshots leaked on December 31 in an effort to prove the hack include internal documents related to telematics on vehicles made for police, internal presentations, project management dashboards, and car part schematics. Some of these screenshots display various dates in 2022, including late December, which suggests that the breach could indeed be new.

If a breach is confirmed, it remains to be seen if the data actually comes from Volvo or from a third party. It’s worth noting that one of the users whose name is displayed in a project management dashboard does indeed appear to be an employee at Volvo, based on their LinkedIn profile.

*SecurityWeek* reached out to Volvo for comment, but the company has yet to respond.

Cybersecurity researcher [Anis Haboubi](#) told *SecurityWeek* that the Tor-based website of the Endurance ransomware group is still under development and it currently does not display any information on potential victims.

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HEADLINE	01/04 FBI perspective on ransomware
SOURCE	<a href="https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/the-fbis-perspective-on-ransomware.html">https://thehackernews.com/2023/01/the-fbis-perspective-on-ransomware.html</a>
GIST	<p><b><i>Ransomware: contemporary threats, how to prevent them and how the FBI can help#</i></b></p> <p>In April 2021, Dutch supermarkets faced a food shortage. The cause wasn't a drought or a sudden surge in the demand for avocados. Rather, the reason was a ransomware attack. In the past years, companies, universities, schools, medical facilities and other organizations have been targeted by ransomware threat actors, turning ransomware into the internet's most severe security crisis.</p> <p><b><u>The Ransomware Landscape#</u></b></p> <p>Ransomware has existed for more than 30 years, but it became a lucrative source of income for cyber actors and gangs in the past decade. Since 2015, ransomware gangs have been targeting organizations instead of individuals. Consequently, ransom sums have increased significantly, reaching millions of dollars.</p> <p>Ransomware is effective because it pressures victims in two, complementary ways. First, by threatening victims to destroy their data. Second, by threatening to publicize the attack. The second threat has an indirect impact, yet it is just as serious (if not more). Publication could trigger regulatory and compliance issues, as well as negative long-term brand effects.</p>

Ransomware as a Service (RaaS) has become the most widespread type of ransomware. In RaaS attacks, the ransomware infrastructure is developed by cyber criminals and then licensed out to other attackers for their use. The customer attackers can pay for the use of software or they can split the loot with the creators. Etay maor, Senior Director Security Strategy at [Cato Networks](#) commented, "There are other forms of RaaS. After receiving the ransomware payment some Ransomware groups sell all the data about the victim's network to other gangs. This means the next attack is much simpler and can be fully automated as it does not require weeks of discovery and network analysis by the attackers."

Some of the major RaaS players, who are notorious for turning the RaaS landscape into what it is today, are CryptoLocker, who infected over a quarter million systems in the 2000s and profited more than \$3 million in less than four months, CryptoWall, who made over \$18 million and prompted an FBI advisory, and finally Petya, NotPetya and WannaCry who used various types of exploits, ransomware included.

### **How the FBI Helps Combat Ransomware#**

An organization under attack is bound to experience frustration and confusion. One of the first recommended courses of action is to contact an Incident Response team. The IR team can assist with investigation, recuperation and negotiations. Then, the FBI can also help.

Part of the FBI's mission is to raise awareness about ransomware. Thanks to a wide local and global network, they have access to valuable intelligence. This information can help victims with negotiations and with operationalization. For example, the FBI might be able to provide profiler information about a threat actor based on its Bitcoin wallet.

To help ransomware victims and to prevent ransomware, the FBI has set up 56 Cyber Task Forces across its field offices. These Task Forces work closely with the IRS, the Department of Education, the Office of Inspector General, the Federal Protective Service and the State Police. They're also in close contact with the Secret Service and have access to regional forensics labs. For National Security cyber crimes, the FBI has a designated Squad.

Alongside the Cyber Task Force, the FBI operates a 24/7 CyWatch, which is a Watch Center for coordinating the field offices, the private sector and other federal and intelligence agencies. There is also an Internet Crime Complaint Center, [ic3.gov](#), for registering complaints and identifying trends.

### **Preventing Ransomware Attacks On Time#**

Many ransomware attacks don't have to reach the point where the FBI is needed. Rather, they can be avoided beforehand. Ransomware is not a single-shot attack. Instead, a series of tactics and techniques all contribute to its execution. By identifying the network and security vulnerabilities in advance that enables the attack, organizations can block or limit threat actors' ability to perform ransomware. Etay Maor added "We need to rethink the concept that "the attackers need to be right just once, the defenders need to be right all the time". A cyber attack is a combination of multiple tactics and techniques. As such, it can only be countered with a holistic approach, with multiple converged security systems that all share context in real time. This is exactly what a [SASE architecture](#), and no other, offers the defenders".

For example, here are all the steps in a REvil attack on a well-known manufacturer, mapped out to the MITRE ATT&CK framework....(As you can see,) there are numerous phases that took place before the actual ransom and were essential to its "success". By mitigating those risks, the attack might have been prevented.

Here is a similar mapping of a Sodinokobi attack....

Maze attack mapping to the MITRE framework....

Another way to map ransomware attacks is through heat maps, which show how often different tactics and techniques are used. Here is a heat map of Maze attacks....

One way to use these mappings is for network analysis and systems testing. By testing a system's resilience to these tactics and techniques and implementing controls that can mitigate any risks, organizations reduce the risk of a ransomware attack by a certain actor on their critical resources.

### **How to Avoid Attacks - From the Horse's Mouth#**

But don't take our word for it. Some ransomware attackers are "kind" enough to provide organizations with best practices for securing themselves from future ransomware attacks. Recommendations include:

- Turning off local passwords
- Using secure passwords
- Forcing the end of admin sessions
- Configuring group policies
- Checking privileged users' access
- Ensuring only necessary applications are running
- Limiting the reliance of Anti-Virus
- Installing EDRs
- 24 hour system admins
- Securing vulnerable ports
- Watching for misconfigured firewalls
- And more

Etay Maor of Cato Networks highlights "Nothing in what several Ransomware groups say organizations need to do is new. These best practices have been discussed for years. The reason they still work is that we try to apply them using disjoint, point solutions. That didn't work and will not work. A SASE, cloud native, architecture, where all security solutions share context and have the capability to see every networks flow and get a holistic view of the attack lifecycle can level the playing field against cyber attacks".

### **Ransomware Prevention: An Ongoing Activity#**

Just like brushing your teeth or exercising, security hygiene is an ongoing, methodical practice. Ransomware attackers have been known to revisit the crime scene and demand a second ransom, if issues haven't been resolved. By employing security controls that can effectively mitigate security threats and having a proper incident response plan in place, the risks can be minimized, as well as the attackers' pay day. The FBI is here to help and provide information that can assist, let's hope that assistance won't be needed.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 GE insider sentenced for IP theft</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/general-electric-insider-two-years/">https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/general-electric-insider-two-years/</a>
GIST	<p>A New York man was sentenced yesterday to 24 months behind bars for his part in a conspiracy to steal aviation trade secrets and send them to China.</p> <p>Xiaoqing Zheng, 59, of Niskayuna, New York, was convicted of conspiracy to commit economic espionage, after a four-week jury trial that ended in March last year, according to the Department of Justice (DoJ).</p> <p>Zheng worked at GE Power's Schenectady plant from 2008 to 2018, where he specialized in engineering turbine sealing technology.</p> <p>His participation in the conspiracy saw top secret IP sent to Chinese companies and universities researching, developing and manufacturing parts for turbines.</p> <p>It's believed to be <a href="#">part of a sophisticated multi-year cyber-espionage campaign</a> designed to help China gain parity with western aerospace firms and help it build the C919 commercial airliner.</p>

	<p>According to assistant director Alan Kohler of the FBI Counterintelligence Division, Zheng was a member of the controversial Thousand Talents Program – a Communist Party initiative designed to recruit science and technology experts living abroad to make the country a world leader in the field by 2050.</p> <p>According to a <a href="#">US Senate report</a>, this and hundreds of other such programs lured as many as 60,000 experts between 2008 and 2016 – many of whom had Chinese heritage. That same report declared the scheme a threat to American interests, given its focus on IP theft.</p> <p>“This is a case of textbook economic espionage. Zheng exploited his position of trust, betrayed his employer and conspired with the government of China to steal innovative American technology,” <a href="#">said assistant attorney general Matthew Olsen</a> of the Justice Department’s National Security Division.</p> <p>“The Justice Department will hold accountable those who threaten our national security by conniving to steal valuable trade secrets on behalf of a foreign power.”</p> <p>Alongside his jail sentence, Zheng will be required to pay a \$7500 fine and serve one year of supervised release post-imprisonment.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/03 Poland: Russia-linked GhostWriter attacks</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/poland-warns-of-attacks-by-russia-linked-ghostwriter-hacking-group/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/poland-warns-of-attacks-by-russia-linked-ghostwriter-hacking-group/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>The Polish government is warning of a spike in cyberattacks from Russia-linked hackers, including the state-sponsored hacking group known as GhostWriter.</p> <p>In an announcement on Poland's official site, the government claims that hostile cyber-activities have intensified, targeting public domains and state organizations, strategic energy and armament providers, and other crucial entities.</p> <p>The Polish believe Russian hackers target their country due to the continued support they have provided Ukraine in the ongoing military conflict with Russia.</p> <p>Recent cyberattacks</p> <p>The first case highlighted by the Polish government post is a DDoS (distributed denial of service) attack against the parliament website ('sejm.gov.pl'), attributed to the pro-Russian so-called hacktivists' NoName057(16).'</p> <p>The attack unfolded the day after the parliament adopted a resolution recognizing Russian as a state sponsor of terrorism, rendering the website inaccessible to the public.</p> <p>Another notable incident mentioned in the announcement is a phishing attack attributed to the 'GhostWriter' group, which the European Union has associated with the GRU, Russia's military intelligence service. Cybersecurity firm Mandiant has also linked the hacking group to the Belarusian government.</p> <p>According to the Polish, the Russian hackers set up websites that impersonate the gov.pl government domain, promoting fake financial compensation for Polish residents allegedly backed by European funds.</p> <p>Clicking on the embedded button to learn more about the program takes victims to a phishing site where they are requested to pay a small fee for verification.</p> <p>"More and more often cyberattacks are used in order to spread Russian disinformation and serve Russian special services to gather data and vulnerable information," explained the Polish government.</p>

	<p>"The operation that is carried out using simultaneously both of these methods is the GhostWriter campaign."</p> <p>GhostWriter has been active since at least 2017, previously observed impersonating journalists from Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland, to disseminate false information and anti-NATO narratives to local audiences.</p> <p>The announcement warns that GhostWriter has been focusing on Poland recently, attempting to breach email accounts to collect information, and taking control of social media accounts to spread false information.</p> <p>In response to the growing cyber threats, Poland's Prime Minister has increased the cybersecurity threat level to 'CHARLIE-CRP,' introducing various measures like maintaining a 24-hour roster in designated offices and public administration organizations.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Rail giant Wabtec data breach</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/rail-giant-wabtec-discloses-data-breach-after-lockbit-ransomware-attack/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/rail-giant-wabtec-discloses-data-breach-after-lockbit-ransomware-attack/</a>
GIST	<p>U.S. rail and locomotive company Wabtec Corporation has disclosed a data breach that exposed personal and sensitive information.</p> <p>Wabtec is a U.S.-based public company producing state-of-the-art locomotives and rail systems. The company employs approximately 25,000 people and has a presence in 50 countries, being the world's market leader in freight locomotives and a major player in the transit segment.</p> <p>The firm's 2021 financial results give a revenue figure of \$7.8 billion, reporting a staggering 20% of the world's freight being moved by the 23,000 of Wabtec's locomotives in global operation.</p> <p><b>Wabtec discloses a data breach</b></p> <p>In an announcement published at the end of the year, Wabtec says hackers breached their network and installed malware on specific systems as early as March 15th, 2022.</p> <p>On June 26th, Wabtec said they detected unusual activity on their network leading to an investigation of the attack and whether the hackers had stolen data.</p> <p>On the next day, <a href="#">news outlets</a> reported that sources at one of Wabtec's plants indicated that it was a ransomware attack impacting the rail giant. However, the company did not officially respond to the rumors.</p> <p>A couple of weeks later, LockBit published samples of data stolen from Wabtec and eventually leaked all stolen data on August 20th, 2022, presumably after a ransom was not paid.</p> <p>As Wabtec explains now, its investigation of the incident was concluded on November 23rd, 2022, when data review specialists confirmed that LockBit had stolen files containing sensitive personal information.</p> <p>This stolen data exposed a wide variety of sensitive information, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Full Name,</li> <li>▪ Date of Birth,</li> <li>▪ Non-US National ID Number,</li> <li>▪ Non-US Social Insurance Number or Fiscal Code,</li> <li>▪ Passport Number,</li> <li>▪ IP Address,</li> <li>▪ Employer Identification Number (EIN),</li> <li>▪ USCIS or Alien Registration Number,</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ NHS (National Health Service) Number (UK),</li> <li>▪ Medical Record/Health Insurance Information,</li> <li>▪ Photograph, Gender/Gender Identity,</li> <li>▪ Salary, Social Security Number (US),</li> <li>▪ Financial Account Information,</li> <li>▪ Payment Card Information,</li> <li>▪ Account Username and Password,</li> <li>▪ Biometric Information,</li> <li>▪ Race/Ethnicity,</li> <li>▪ Criminal Conviction or Offense,</li> <li>▪ Sexual Orientation/Life,</li> <li>▪ Religious Beliefs,</li> <li>▪ Union Affiliation</li> </ul> <p>"While there is no indication that any specific information was or will be misused, considering the nature of the incident and of the affected personal data, we cannot rule out that there may be attempts to carry out fraudulent activity." - <a href="#">Wabtec</a>.</p> <p>"For this reason, Wabtec encourages individuals to remain vigilant against incidents of identity theft and fraud by reviewing their financial account statements and credit reports for any anomalies."</p> <p>The company started sending notices of a data breach to all impacted individuals on December 30th, 2022, but the exact number of people affected by the incident remains undisclosed.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Exchange servers vulnerable RCE flaw</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-60-000-exchange-servers-vulnerable-to-proxynotshell-attacks/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/over-60-000-exchange-servers-vulnerable-to-proxynotshell-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>More than 60,000 Microsoft Exchange servers exposed online are yet to be patched against the CVE-2022-41082 remote code execution (RCE) vulnerability, one of the two security flaws targeted by ProxyNotShell exploits.</p> <p>According to a <a href="#">recent tweet</a> from security researchers at the Shadowserver Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving internet security, almost 70,000 Microsoft Exchange servers were found to be vulnerable to ProxyNotShell attacks according to version information (the servers' x_owa_version header).</p> <p>However, new data published on Monday shows that the number of vulnerable Exchange servers <a href="#">has decreased</a> from 83,946 instances in mid-December to 60,865 detected on January 2nd.</p> <p>These two security bugs, tracked as <a href="#">CVE-2022-41082</a> and <a href="#">CVE-2022-41040</a> and collectively known as ProxyNotShell, affect Exchange Server 2013, 2016, and 2019.</p> <p>If successfully exploited, attackers can escalate privileges and gain arbitrary or remote code execution on compromised servers.</p> <p>Microsoft released security updates to address the flaws during the <a href="#">November 2022 Patch Tuesday</a>, even though ProxyNotShell attacks have been detected in the wild <a href="#">since at least September 2022</a>.</p> <p>Threat intelligence company GreyNoise has been tracking ongoing ProxyNotShell exploitation since September 30th and provides information on <a href="#">ProxyNotShell scanning activity</a> and a list of IP addresses linked to the attacks.</p> <p><b>Thousands also exposed to ProxyShell and ProxyLogon attacks</b></p>



In order to protect your Exchange servers from incoming attacks, you have to apply the ProxyNotShell patches released by Microsoft [in November](#).

While the company also provided mitigation measures, these can be bypassed by attackers, meaning that only fully patched servers are secure from compromise.

As [reported](#) by BleepingComputer last month, Play ransomware threat actors are now using a new exploit chain to bypass [ProxyNotShell URL rewrite mitigations](#) and gain remote code execution on vulnerable servers through Outlook Web Access (OWA).

To make things even worse, a [Shodan search](#) reveals a significant number of Exchange servers exposed online, with thousands left unpatched against ProxyShell and ProxyLogon vulnerabilities that made it into the [top most exploited vulnerabilities](#) in 2021.

Exchange servers are valuable targets, as demonstrated by the financially motivated FIN7 cybercrime group which has developed a custom auto-attack platform known as Checkmarks and [designed to breach Exchange servers](#).

According to threat intelligence firm Prodaft, which discovered the platform, it scans for and exploits various Microsoft Exchange remote code execution and privilege elevation vulnerabilities, such as CVE-2021-34473, CVE-2021-34523, and CVE-2021-31207.

FIN7's new platform has already been used to infiltrate 8,147 companies, primarily located in the United States (16.7%), after scanning over 1.8 million targets.

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HEADLINE	01/03 Ongoing Flipper Zero phishing attacks
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ongoing-flipper-zero-phishing-attacks-target-infosec-community/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/ongoing-flipper-zero-phishing-attacks-target-infosec-community/</a>
GIST	<p>A new phishing campaign is exploiting the increasing interest of security community members towards Flipper Zero to steal their personal information and cryptocurrency.</p> <p>Flipper Zero is a portable multi-functional cybersecurity tool for pen-testers and hacking enthusiasts. The tool allows researchers to tinker with a wide range of hardware by supporting RFID emulation, digital access key cloning, radio communications, NFC, infrared, Bluetooth, and more.</p> <p>The developers launched the device after a massively successful 2020 <a href="#">Kickstarter campaign</a>, which surpassed the funding goal of \$60,000 by 81 times, after receiving \$4,882,784 in pledges.</p> <p>Since then, security researchers' demonstrations of the endlessly amusing and somewhat scary capabilities of Flipper Zero on social media have helped generate much hype around the device, raising the interest of aspiring hackers and researchers.</p> <p>However, in the past year, the product was hampered by production issues causing supply shortages that made it impossible to meet the still-growing demand.</p> <p>In September 2022, <a href="#">revenue holdbacks by digital payments platform PayPal</a> put the project at risk, endangering its production by holding \$1.3 million destined for ordering new production batches.</p> <p><b>Targeting cybersecurity researchers</b></p> <p>Threat actors are now taking advantage of the immense interest in Flipper Zero and its lack of availability by creating fake shops pretending to sell it.</p> <p>These phishing campaigns were discovered by security analyst <a href="#">Dominic Alvieri</a>, who spotted three fake Twitter accounts and two fake Flipper Zero stores.</p>

At first glance, one of the fake Twitter accounts appears to have the same handle as the official Flipper Zero account. However, in reality, it uses a capital “I” in the name, which looks just like an “l” on Twitter.

This fake Twitter account is actively responding to people about availability and other account's tweets to make it look legitimate.

At the time of writing this, one of the fake shops remains online, pretending to sell Flipper Zero, the Wi-Fi module, and the case at the same price as the actual shop.

The goal is to take buyers to the phishing checkout page, where they are requested to enter their email addresses, full names, and shipping addresses.

The victims are then given a choice to pay using Ethereum or Bitcoin cryptocurrency and are told that their order will be processed within 15 minutes after submission

The listed wallet addresses have not received any payments, so either the particular shop hasn't managed to trick any security researchers or used new wallets after each transaction.

The threat actors have since switched to using plisio.net invoices to accept crypto payments, which now include Litecoin. However, these invoices are not working, stating that the order has expired.

As long as the interest and shortages continue, cybercriminals will continue to attempt to impersonate Flipper Zero through fake shops to trick security enthusiasts into giving up their personal information and crypto.

Due to this, it is vital to be on the lookout for these promotions and shops claiming immediate product availability and only buy from the official store.

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HEADLINE	01/03 BitRAT campaign: stolen data for phishing
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/bitrat-malware-campaign-uses-stolen-bank-data-for-phishing/">https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/bitrat-malware-campaign-uses-stolen-bank-data-for-phishing/</a>
GIST	<p>Threat actors behind a recent malware campaign have been using the stolen information of bank customers in Colombia as lures in phishing emails designed to infect targets with the BitRAT remote access trojan, according to cloud security firm Qualys.</p> <p>The company found that the infrastructure of an undisclosed Colombian cooperative bank had been hijacked by attackers while investigating BitRAT lures in active phishing attacks.</p> <p>A total of 418,777 records containing sensitive customer data, including names, phone numbers, email addresses, addresses, Colombian national IDs, payment records, and salary information, were stolen from the breached servers.</p> <p>While investigating the campaign, Qualys also discovered evidence that the attackers had accessed customers' data, including logs showing that they looked for SQL injection bugs using the sqlmap tool.</p> <p>"Moreover, the lures themselves contain sensitive data from the bank to make them appear legitimate. This means that the attacker has gotten access to customers' data," Qualys said.</p> <p>"While digging deeper into the infrastructure we identified logs that point to the usage of the tool sqlmap to find potential SQLi faults, along with actual database dumps."</p>

	<p>At the moment, none of the information stolen from the Colombian bank's servers has been found on dark web or clearweb sites monitored by Qualys.</p> <p>The malware is delivered to victims' computers via a malicious Excel file that drops and executes an INF file encoded within a highly obfuscated macro bundled with the attachment.</p> <p>The final BitRAT payload is then downloaded from a GitHub repository using the WinHTTP library on the compromised device and executed with the help of the WinExec function.</p> <p>During the last stage of the attack, the RAT malware moves its loader to the Windows startup folder to gain persistence and automatically restart after system reboots.</p> <p>Since at least August 2020, BitRAT has been sold as off-the-shelf malware on dark web markets and cybercrime forums for as little as \$20 for lifetime access.</p> <p>After paying for a license, each "customer" uses their own approach to infect victims with this malware, such as phishing, watering holes, and trojanized software.</p> <p>The highly versatile BitRAT can be used for a variety of malicious purposes, including recording video and audio, data theft, DDoS attacks, cryptocurrency mining, and delivering additional payloads.</p> <p>"Commercial off the shelf. RATs have been evolving their methodology to spread and infect their victims," said Qualys threat research senior engineer Akshat Pradhan.</p> <p>"They have also increased the usage of legitimate infrastructures to host their payloads and defenders need to account for it."</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Chinese 'RedZei' incessant vishing</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/chinese-redzei-victims-vishing">https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/chinese-redzei-victims-vishing</a>
GIST	<p>Chinese threat actors have been targeting Chinese-speaking students in the United Kingdom with a unique phone scam that aims to steal their personal information with repeated phone calls and voicemails that are hard for victims or carriers to block.</p> <p>A group dubbed RedZei — or RedThief — calls victims once or twice a month from a unique UK-based phone number, leaving an "unusual" automated voicemail message if the receiver does not answer, revealed cybersecurity researcher Will Thomas <a href="#">in a blog post</a> published just before the new year.</p> <p>"I got the recorded voicemails and identified that they are almost certainly scam calls from Chinese-speaking fraudsters targeting Chinese international students at universities in the UK," he wrote in his post.</p> <p>Thomas, who goes by <a href="#">BushidoToken</a> on Twitter, said he's been tracking the campaign for more than a year, and has created a profile for the threat actors based on the calls and voicemails. RedZei chooses its targets carefully, seeming to know that these foreign students would be "a rich victim group that is ripe for exploitation," he wrote in the post.</p> <p>What's more, once a victim is a target of the scam — which employs social engineering tactics to get students to give up personal information — it's difficult to block future attempts to compromise victims, Thomas said. That's because for each wave of scam calls, RedZei mainly uses a new pay-as-you-go UK-based phone number from one of the main mobile network operators, he explained.</p> <p>"This essentially renders blocking the scammers phone numbers ineffective," Thomas wrote.</p> <p><b>The Scam Itself</b></p>

Phone call-based scams (aka ["vishing" campaigns](#)) are not unique in the cybercriminal world. Threat actors have been known to [employ entire call centers](#) to make malicious robocalls in attempts to defraud victims, impersonating banks and other trusted entities. In another version, scammers use emails or some other method of Internet-based contact to convince victims to make a phone call to, say, a bogus "tech support" number, where their personal information is harvested for malicious intent.

The RedZei campaign shares some similar tactics but also puts its own twist on the phone scam. It has used known enterprises, such as the Bank of China or China Mobile (CMLink), in socially engineered campaigns to try to fool the students to give up their personal details. But they use other scams as well, according to Thomas.

"Other themes exploited by RedZei includes the 'abnormal usage of your NHS number' and international parcels being delivered from DHL, which are both common concerns for Chinese students studying in the UK," he said.

Thomas doesn't speak Chinese and did not manage to have all the voicemails associated with the most recent campaign translated. He's posted the voicemails that he could not get verified by Chinese speakers to his [SoundCloud account](#) and included [a GitHub link](#) for people to use if they can translate the calls.

### Difficult to Mitigate

Thomas included a list of numbers associated with the RedZei campaign in his post. The numbers are primarily +44 numbers — the country code for the United Kingdom — with one number from an Irish (+353) carrier and one from a Norwegian (+47) carrier.

O2 is the UK telecom carrier most often associated with the numbers the threat actors use to attempt to compromise victims, while EE and Three are also favored by RedZei. The Ireland-based number used a Tesco Mobile SIM card, while the Norwegian carrier used by the threat group was Telia, according to Thomas.

Just as victims are at a loss to do anything to stop the scam, carriers also are challenged to try to halt the activity because of the frequency with which RedZei changes carriers and thus SIM cards, Thomas noted.

There is also a language barrier, he said. "As the activity is also in Chinese, the carriers are less likely to investigate this campaign [because of the] additional effort required," Thomas wrote.

All in all, this does not bode well for victims of the scam, which won't see relief from the calls anytime soon, he said.

"The RedZei group, and others like it, are therefore effectively operating with impunity and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future," Thomas wrote.

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HEADLINE	01/02 What is a pig butchering scam?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.wired.com/story/what-is-pig-butchering-scam/?redirectURL=%2Fstory%2Fwhat-is-pig-butchering-scam%2F">https://www.wired.com/story/what-is-pig-butchering-scam/?redirectURL=%2Fstory%2Fwhat-is-pig-butchering-scam%2F</a>
GIST	<p><b>DIGITAL SWINDLES LIKE</b> <a href="#">business email compromises</a> and <a href="#">romance scams</a> generate billions of dollars for criminals. And they all start with a little bit of “social engineering” to trick a victim into doing something disadvantageous, whether that's trusting someone they shouldn't or sending money into the void. Now, a new variation of these schemes, known as “pig butchering,” is on the rise, ensnaring unsuspecting targets to steal all of their money and operating at a massive scale thanks in large part to forced labor.</p> <p>Pig butchering scams originated in China, where they came to be known by the Chinese version of the phrase <i>shāzhūpán</i> because of an approach in which attackers essentially fatten victims up and then take</p>

everything they've got. These scams are typically cryptocurrency schemes, though they can involve other types of financial trading as well.

Scammers cold-contact people on SMS texting or other social media, dating, and communication platforms. Often they'll simply say "Hi" or something like "Hey Josh, it was fun catching up last week!" If the recipient responds to say that the attacker has the wrong number, the scammer seizes the opportunity to strike up a conversation and guide the victim toward feeling like they've hit it off with a new friend. After establishing a rapport, the attacker will introduce the idea that they have been making a lot of money in cryptocurrency investing and suggest the target consider getting involved while they can.

Next, the scammer gets the target set up with a malicious app or web platform that appears trustworthy and may even impersonate the platforms of legitimate financial institutions. Once inside the portal, victims can often see curated real-time market data meant to show the potential of the investment. And once the target funds their "investment account," they can start watching their balance "grow." Crafting the malicious financial platforms to look legitimate and refined is a hallmark of pig butchering scams, as are other touches that add verisimilitude, like letting victims do a video call with their new "friend" or allowing them to withdraw a little bit of money from the platform to reassure them. The latter is a tactic that scammers also use in traditional Ponzi schemes.

Though the swindle has some new twists, you can still see where it's going. Once the victim has deposited all the money they have and everything the scammers can get them to borrow, the attackers shut down the account and disappear.

"That's the whole pig butchering thing—they are going for the whole hog," says Sean Gallagher, a senior threat researcher at the security firm Sophos who has been tracking pig butchering as it has emerged over the past three years. "They go after people who are vulnerable. Some of the victims are people who have had long-term health problems, who are older, people who feel isolated. They want to get every last bit of oink, and they are persistent."

Though carrying off pig butchering scams takes a lot of communication and relationship building with victims over time, researchers say that crime syndicates in China developed scripts and playbooks that allowed them to offload the work at scale onto inexperienced scammers or even forced laborers who are [victims of human trafficking](#).

"We can already see the damage and the human cost both to scam victims and to forced laborers," says Michael Roberts, a longtime digital forensic analyst who has been working with victims of pig butchering attacks. "That's why we need to start educating people about this threat so we can disrupt the cycle and reduce the demand for these kidnappings and forced labor."

The concept is similar to that of ransomware attacks and digital extortion in which law enforcement encourages victims not to pay hackers' ransom demands so they will be disincentivized to keep trying.

The Chinese government [cracked down](#) on cryptocurrency scams beginning in 2021, but criminals have been able to move their pig butchering operations to Southeast Asian countries including Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Governments around the world have [increasingly](#) been [warning](#) about the threat. In 2021, the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center [received](#) more than 4,300 submissions related to pig butchering scams, totaling more than \$429 million in losses. And at the end of November, the US Department of Justice [announced](#) that it had seized seven domain names used in pig butchering scams in 2022.

"In this scheme, fraudsters, posing as highly successful traders in cryptocurrency, entice victims to make purported investments in cryptocurrency providing fictitious returns to encourage additional investments," the FBI [said](#) in an October alert.

	<p>Government officials and researchers emphasize that public education is a key component of helping people avoid becoming the victim of a pig butchering scheme. If people know the telltale signs and understand the concepts underlying the scams, they are less likely to be ensnared. The challenge, they say, is reaching the wider public and getting people who learn about pig butchering to pass on the information to others in their families and social circles.</p> <p>As with romance scams and other highly personal and exploitative attacks, researchers say that pig butchering scams take an enormous psychological toll on victims in addition to their financial toll. And the <a href="#">use of forced labor</a> to carry out pig butchering schemes adds yet another layer of trauma and creates even more urgency to addressing the threat.</p> <p>“Some of the stories you hear from victims—it eats you up,” says Ronnie Tokazowski, a longtime business email compromise and pig butchering researcher and principal threat advisor at the cybersecurity firm Cofense. “It eats you up really freaking bad.”</p>
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## Terrorism, Extremism

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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Rockets hit US base in east Syria</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-united-states-government-syria-a084d4f06f43058c7bb68be2864074f4">https://apnews.com/article/iran-politics-united-states-government-syria-a084d4f06f43058c7bb68be2864074f4</a>
GIST	<p>BEIRUT (AP) — Two rockets struck a base housing American troops in eastern Syria on Wednesday without causing any human or material losses, the U.S. military said.</p> <p>The morning attack on Mission Support Site Conoco came as Iran and its allies in the region marked the third anniversary of the killing of Iran’s elite Quds force chief Gen. Qassem Soleimani, in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad.</p> <p>No one claimed responsibility for the attack in east Syria, where it is not uncommon for bases housing U.S. troops to come under rocket fire or mortar attacks. Iran-backed militia are based nearby as are sleeper cells of the Islamic State group that was defeated in Syria in March 2019.</p> <p>The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, said the rockets were fired by Arab tribesmen in the region who are armed by Iran.</p> <p>“Attacks of this kind place Coalition Forces and the civilian populace at risk and undermine the hard-earned stability and security of Syria and the region,” said Joe Buccino, spokesman for US Central Command, in a statement.</p> <p>CENTCOM said members of the Kurdish-led and U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces visited the rocket origin site and found a third that was not fire.</p> <p>There are roughly 900 U.S. troops in Syria, including in the north and farther south and east.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Afghan commander who was left behind</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d385g/abandoned-afghan-forces-taliban">https://www.vice.com/en/article/5d385g/abandoned-afghan-forces-taliban</a>
GIST	<p><b>October 2020</b></p> <p>It's late October, 2020, in one of Afghanistan’s eastern provinces. Distant puffs of smoke and a flurry of snaps overhead.</p> <p>“That's the Taliban,” says a soldier, pointing to a valley between the rugged mountains.</p>



The sporadic popping of gunfire echoes down the valley. The militia men are shooting back from a small outpost above. The soldier ducks as more bullets snap overhead—he just turned 19 and has only been fighting with the militia for two months. The seasoned commander behind him doesn't flinch.

Hundreds of soldiers in dozens of militia units are holding outposts in the area. The Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) have their own outposts and larger bases, some of which were once jointly occupied by Americans. The militia's headquarters in another district has no shortage of men, money, or weapons, but this 20-man-strong unit is struggling.

The soldiers are a mismatch of characters in worn-out high-top sneakers and ill-fitting fatigues who joined the unit at different times and have varying levels of experience. The newest members received no training and joined with their own weapons, but all were united with the same cause: to defend their villages. Most of his men have been injured, says the commander, and all have lost friends to the bitter fight.

At this stage in late 2020, the U.S.-NATO troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is well underway and levels of [violence are escalating](#) across the country.

While the U.S. packs up, Afghan forces who'd been fighting insurgent groups including the Taliban and ISIS for decades, face down an uncertain future without [American support](#).

Now, local militias bear the lion's share of fighting against the Taliban in many parts of eastern Afghanistan, often operating with support from the ANA and ANP. Poorly funded and poorly equipped, the militias draw their ranks from men in the local community. From each family in the area there is at least one man in the ANA, ANP or militia, one soldier said.

The commander of this unit, who remains anonymous in this story to protect his identity, leads about 150 men across dozens of outposts. He has been fighting for nearly as long as the U.S. has been in the country and he fought alongside them, sharing a base together and going on joint operations. Beyond this, they shared a personal relationship, he tells Vice World News. "We were friends and they really trusted me."

"The enemy has stronger weapons than us," he says. "We only have one heavy machine gun between three checkpoints." Other, more remote outposts are even less equipped, he adds.

Both enlisted men and local commanders say they felt the U.S. was leaving Afghanistan at a critical time—and pulling financial and military support just when it was needed most.

The commander says Taliban attacks are on the increase. Still, he is confident. "The Taliban can't win, they cannot take this area from us, and the people know it," he shouts over the music blaring out of his truck. It's not clear if he believes his own words or is simply putting on a brave face for his men.

"It is good if they come to us," he says with a grin, "and lay down their weapons."

Ten months later, on August 15, 2021, Afghanistan was taken over by the Taliban. The Afghan army dissolved in days and the U.S. and coalition forces left the country in a chaotic withdrawal. Some Afghan forces were evacuated, but [tens of thousands](#) were also left behind. Some fled to neighboring countries, while others went into hiding.

Half of the men from the unit were killed in the final days of fighting.

The commander survived.

## **June 2022**

It's almost a year after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan and the commander looks tired, as if he aged several years.

“I have been fighting for 19 years to keep the Taliban out and I have lost many men. Now, all the blood and fighting has been for no result.”

In the weeks before the takeover, there was heavy fighting between government forces and the rapidly encroaching Taliban, says the commander. “During the day, we were stronger, but at night the Taliban were stronger. They had night vision [equipment], and we didn't.” He claims that every night as many as 12 militia soldiers across the province he manned were killed.

Just days before the Taliban swept to victory, the provincial governor had told the commander that the militias were going to resist “no matter who is surrendering across the country,” says the commander.

But the events that quickly unfolded days later left him and his men in an impossible position, he says. [In just 10 days](#), the Taliban had seized the last 22 of the country's 34 provincial capitals.

The Taliban did not have to fight their way into all of Afghanistan's provincial capitals but rather brokered a series of surrenders.

“They never won Afghanistan. They only have it because we gave it to them,” he says.

“The surrender started from the cities, not from our checkpoints in the mountains. We were strong, we had enough men and weapons, and ready to defend the country. We would have continued the fight until members were all killed, but [my boss] told me that the whole country is surrendering. And when your commander tells you to step down, there is nothing you can do.”

When he received a call from his superior at 11 p.m., telling him and his men to surrender to the Taliban, he fainted.

“I just lost control over myself, the phone fell from my hand, and I went blank for 15 minutes,” he says, shaking his head, recalling the moment.

He leans forward, wincing. “That was it... a surrender.” He throws his hands up. “And that's when all our lives changed forever. That's when Afghanistan changed forever.”

That night the Taliban came to his base and the commander handed over everything to them, as instructed. “I handed over the keys of my car and left the base on foot with just my scarf. It was a heartbreaking moment, we all were crying, I couldn't sleep for the nights after and started taking sleeping medication. Even dying would be better than this, I guess.”

While they wept, and as Taliban fighters moved into Afghanistan's capital city, the nation's leader, President Ashraf Ghani, left the country along with other high-ranking government officials. Members of the Taliban were soon [pictured inside the presidential palace](#) hours later as they prepared to announce a Taliban government.

The commander says that senior officials and politicians who had property outside Afghanistan made deals to enable them to flee before the collapse. “They did not want to be detained and tortured by the Taliban like we were, so they fled before they gave the order for us to surrender,” he says.

His claims are echoed by [reports that emerged earlier this year](#) of Afghan elites and several former officials from the Western-backed Kabul government escaping to luxury condos in Dubai and beachside villas in California in the lead-up to the takeover.

As for many of those like him, who fought and led on the frontlines, the commander passes his days in hiding, afraid to venture out or seek a new job. “I have nothing to do but sit at home. If I do anything, they'll come after me again. But I can't live hiding for the rest of my life. I have to find a way and leave.”

He says that his men are in a different situation. Most, he says, are without work but safe from the Taliban “because they did not hold senior positions,” like he did. Few have found daily work as laborers or helping out with the family business, but in most cases, the Taliban are not allowing members of the former Afghan security forces to work.

“They’re following us everywhere. We cannot work or contact or visit relatives. We can’t sleep,” he says quietly.

In the aftermath of the loss, none of his soldiers were evacuated, he says.

Many of those who were not killed in the last days of fighting have fled the country, or are seeking ways to leave, he says, estimating that at least a dozen of his men have gone to Pakistan or Iran.

“More than 1,400 militia soldiers and staff were left behind,” he claims, adding that the estimate is from two districts alone.

“It’s hard to keep hope when so much time has passed.”

### **Present day**

There are no reliable numbers of how many Afghan security forces were killed in the final weeks of fighting, but some have said it is in the [thousands](#), with many more missing.

Today, those left behind fear being caught up in [unlawful targeted killings](#) of people whom the Taliban perceives as adversaries.

The commander wonders why he has been forgotten.

“We had an alliance and friendship with the Americans. They would call on us to join in operations because we knew the area. The American special forces trained us. At one time, we shared a base with them and they paid our salaries. They trusted us and we had a responsibility to protect those areas from Taliban or Daesh for the Americans. Now, it’s the Americans’ responsibility to evacuate us.”

Today, many like the commander feel let down and used.

“Almost one month before the collapse, the head commander gave our details to the Americans and they promised that they would hire a lawyer to work for us and get us evacuated. This continued for three months, but then there was no further contact.”

Despite many promises of help, the commander himself was abandoned by the Americans. He has since been beaten by the Taliban several times.

“I was promised by the Americans to be evacuated from Afghanistan, but after the collapse, they didn’t answer me.”

It has been over a year since the Taliban’s seizing of the country. The Taliban are still not recognised internationally and by many of their own countrymen, while the soldiers left behind are lost in the crowd, hiding in homes, and beginning to believe that no one is coming back for them.

It has also been over a year since Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid [promised a gentler rule](#).

“I would like to assure all the compatriots, whether they were translators, whether they were with military activities, or whether they were civilians, all of them have been important. Nobody is going to be treated with revenge.”

He assured that “nobody is going to knock on their door to inspect them, to ask them or to interrogate them as to who they have been working for or interpreting for.... They’re going to be safe.”

He also said thousands of soldiers have been pardoned.

Since then the Taliban has repeatedly reiterated their commitment to the general amnesty they announced. The reality, as the commander attests and other investigations show, is drastically different.

Human rights groups have accused the Taliban of carrying out widespread revenge killings, enforced disappearances, and torture of former Afghan officials, security officers, and individuals who cooperated with the departed U.S.-led military presence in Afghanistan.

A [seven-month investigation by the New York Times](#) found that nearly 500 former government workers and members of the security forces were killed or forcibly disappeared during the Taliban's first six months in power.

Since Aug. 15, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan [has documented](#) 160 extrajudicial killings, 178 arbitrary detentions, and 56 instances of torture and ill treatment of former government and security forces and government officials by the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan as of June 15, 2022.

The Taliban [rejected the U.N. claim](#). "The UN secretary-general's information that hundreds of members of the previous government were killed after the rule of the Islamic Emirate is not true. After a general amnesty, no one is allowed to harm anyone," Mujahid said on Twitter.

But just three months ago, on Sept. 15, [Amnesty International released a report](#) saying that the ongoing Taliban killings indicate a pattern of attacks on ethnic minorities and members of the former security forces.

It is estimated that there are [78,000 left behind](#) in Afghanistan.

According to advocates, as many as [265,000 Afghans and their families](#) may have had some form of eligibility to apply for a U.S. visa because of their work with U.S. governmental and nongovernmental organizations during the past two decades. Though there is still no definite count on exactly how many.

A year since the takeover, [Department of Homeland Security data](#) shows 160,000 Afghans eligible for Special Immigrant Visas are still waiting for their applications to be processed. Each application takes an average of three years.

Just 8,000 Special Immigrant Visas for Afghans were processed and completed from September 2021 to August 2022 - averaging 725 per month, according to an [August 2022 report](#) by the Association of Wartime Allies, a nonprofit advocacy group.

As of August, of the 66,000 Afghans who had applied, a mere 123 have been approved, [according](#) to the investigative outlet *Reveal*.

[Tens of thousands more](#) are still stranded at military bases and refugee camps across the world as the U.S. government evaluates their cases and wrestles with logistical challenges to processing their admission.

Last summer, Secretary of State Antony Blinken promised that the U.S. commitment to Afghan allies "[has no deadline](#)." The commander feels it has passed.

"It is easy for America to move on from Afghanistan because they are gone. But thousands of us did not just disappear as the Taliban took our places. We are still here, still alive and still breathing and unable to move on," says the commander.

He smiles as he flips through photographs of himself draped in the Afghan flag, in sunglasses, with an RPG casually slung over his shoulder, his truck and his men behind him.

He has lost his country, his job, his purpose, and his pride, he says.

	"That feels like a long time ago now."
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/04 Taliban link to Turkish AQ via Iran</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://nordicmonitor.com/2023/01/taliban-networked-with-turkish-al-qaeda-affiliate-courtesy-of-iranian-intelligence/">https://nordicmonitor.com/2023/01/taliban-networked-with-turkish-al-qaeda-affiliate-courtesy-of-iranian-intelligence/</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Iranian intelligence brokered a meeting between a senior Taliban official and a member of Turkish al-Qaeda affiliate the Islamic Great East Raiders Front (İslami Büyük Doğu Akıncıları Cephesi, IBDA-C) in Istanbul in November 2022, Nordic Monitor has learned.</p> <p>The meeting was held in an office of Rehber TV, a Turkish-language religious network that is funded by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force operatives. Zabihullah Mujahid, the Taliban spokesman and deputy minister of information and culture who had been in Turkey for several days on a visit that was coordinated by Iranian assets, met with Faruk Hanedar, a senior militant who works for IBDA-C.</p> <p>IBDA-C even published an interview with Mujahid in its monthly magazine Baran, owned by Hanedar, and promoted the meeting on the cover of its November 2022 issue. The interview was titled with a remark by Mujahid: "What we really need is an Islamic state model."</p> <p>Interview excerpts also reveal that the militant group discussed future plans with the Taliban and pitched IBDA-C's goal of destroying the secular and democratic governance in Turkey and establishing what it called the Great Eastern Islamic State. The new state's capital would be in Istanbul and include other so-called Islamic states as well.</p> <p>IBDA-C is listed as terrorist entity by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. Many members were arrested, indicted, tried and sentenced to prison, including Salih İzzet Erdiş (aka Salih Mirzabeyoğlu, or the Commandant), the late leader of IBDA/C who was convicted on terrorism charges.</p> <p>Erdiş established the organization in 1985 and turned it into a deadly terrorist group, with dozens of attacks between 1990 and 1998, according to an indictment filed with the court on January 12, 1999. The group attacked Armenian, Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches as well as synagogues and American colleges in Turkey with bombs and Molotov cocktails. They specifically targeted banks, stores that sell alcoholic beverages, designer shops, political party buildings, newspapers and associations that were opposed to the IBDA/C ideology.</p> <p>The IBDA-C also claimed responsibility for a range of terrorist acts in Turkey including what authorities said was a joint plot with al-Qaeda in carrying out the 2003 bombings in İstanbul of two synagogues, an HSBC bank branch and the British Consulate General, and a 2008 attack on the US Consulate General in İstanbul. The attacks killed dozens of people.</p> <p>IBDA/C publications openly praise the late al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and promote him as a martyr who stood up against imperialists. IBDA/C leader Erdiş described him as "a man who struck the US in the heart."</p> <p>On February 4, 2001 the Bakırköy 3rd High Criminal Court convicted Erdiş on multiple charges and sentenced him to death, but his sentence was converted to life imprisonment in 2004 after Turkey abolished the death penalty. However, on July 22, 2014 then-prime minister and now president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan secured the release of Erdiş from prison and later his acquittal of all charges after a hastily arranged retrial.</p> <p>The establishment of ties between the Taliban and IBDA/C means Turkish jihadists have found a new sanctuary in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, as was the case in the past. Dozens of Turks travelled to Afghanistan in the late '90s and early 2000s to fight for al-Qaeda groups and were trained in arms and</p>

explosives there. Some of them were arrested in Turkey upon their return, but they were all released thanks to Erdoğan government interventions in the criminal justice system.

While he was in Turkey, Mujahid attended a conference organized by the Union of Islamic Scholars and Madrasahs (Alimler ve Medreseler Birliği, or İTTİHADUL ULEMA), an affiliate of Turkish Hizbullah, which is funded and supported by the IRGC. The group, predominantly catering to Kurds in Turkey, seeks to establish an Iranian-style mullah regime in the country.

The chairman of the Union of Islamic Scholars and Madrasahs is a man named Enver Kılıçarslan, who was convicted in February 2002 of membership in Hizbullah and sentenced to seven years, six months. He was trained in Iran in 1987 and assigned to serve under the late Turkish Hizbullah leader Hüseyin Velioglu, who was killed in a gunfight with police during a raid on a safe house in Istanbul in January 2000.

At a conference organized in Turkey by the Iran-backed International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), Mujahid told the audience that Islamic scholars led the ranks of the jihad against the enemy in Afghanistan and that the victory in 2021 was made possible thanks to this.

Mujahid also met with Muslim Brotherhood figures in Turkey such as Ali Muhiuddin Qara Daghi, general secretary of the International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS), and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and his deputy Saleh al-Arouri.

Turkey's Islamist government, led by Erdoğan, hailed the Taliban's comeback. Speaking on July 20, 2021 Erdoğan said his government would negotiate with the Taliban, whom he said should feel comfortable talking with Turkey, as opposed to the Americans. He justified his reasoning by underlining that "Turkey has nothing against the Taliban's ideology, and since we aren't in conflict with the Taliban's beliefs, I believe we can better discuss and agree with them on issues."

The Taliban responded to Erdoğan's calls, with Mullah Mohammad Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, telling The Independent Turkish service that they see Turkey as an ally and want to build close relations with it. The same talking points were repeated by Mujahid in the speeches he delivered in Turkey in November 2022.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Burkina Faso violence</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64151791">https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-64151791</a>
GIST	<p>The bodies of 28 people who were shot dead have been discovered in Burkina Faso's north-western town of Nouna, the government has said.</p> <p>A civil society group blamed the killings on armed civilians claiming to be members of a government-backed volunteer force fighting jihadists.</p> <p>The government did not comment on the claim, but said it was investigating.</p> <p>Burkina Faso has been hit by a decade-long insurgency that has displaced nearly two million people.</p> <p>The military seized power in Burkina Faso last January, promising an end to attacks, but the violence still rages.</p> <p>The government said the bodies were discovered on 30 and 31 December.</p> <p>It condemned the "unacceptable violence" and called for calm, pending the outcome of an investigation.</p> <p>The incident had occurred at a time when the government had initiated the "mobilisation of the whole people for unity of action in the fight against terrorism", it added.</p>



	<p>The government has formed the Homeland Defence Volunteers (VDP), recruiting civilians into its ranks to fight militant Islamists.</p> <p>A civil society group, the Collective Against Impunity and Stigmatisation of Communities (CISC), said that armed civilians, claiming to be members of the VDP, carried out the killings in retaliation for an attack by suspected militants between 29 and 30 December.</p> <p>There is no independent confirmation of its claim.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Ga. governor warns militant activists</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.yahoo.com/news/gov-kemp-says-militant-activists-232158454.html">https://www.yahoo.com/news/gov-kemp-says-militant-activists-232158454.html</a>
GIST	<p>Governor Brian Kemp is renewing calls for activists protesting an Atlanta Police Department training facility in DeKalb County to be arrested and charged with domestic terrorism.</p> <p>The training facility, known as cop city, has been the target of protestors and vandals for months.</p> <p>The future site of a \$90 million, 85-acre facility sits on the largest urban forest in metro Atlanta. Protestors say its presence would be bad for the environment.</p> <p>Last month, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation arrested five people and charged them with domestic terrorism.</p> <p>Gov. Kemp released a statement on Tuesday saying they will not stop fighting against “militant activists...with no regard for the people or communities impacted by their crimes.”</p> <p>“Domestic terrorism will NOT be tolerated in our state, and we will not hesitate, we will not rest, we will not waver in ending their activities and prosecuting them to the fullest extent of the law,” his statement read.</p> <p>Some of those incidents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Protesters throwing a Molotov cocktail at police officers</a> as they attempted to arrest them for trespassing on the grounds of what will be the new training center.</li> <li>• <a href="#">A fire at the westside At-Promise Center</a>, which is a crime diversion program geared toward supporting at-risk youth in Atlanta.</li> <li>• <a href="#">Vandalism of the Cobb County office of a building contractor</a> working on the project, and weeks later vandalism at the Cobb County home of an executive.</li> <li>• On several occasions, barricades or other material on the construction site set on fire on or near the project site.</li> <li>• Ball bearings propelled via slingshot at a utility van, causing damage.</li> <li>• Vandalism of the offices of the parent company of a subcontractor working on the project — located in Florida, Nebraska, Minnesota and New York — which included spray-painted phrases alluding to the Atlanta project.</li> </ul> <p>“The only response we will give to intimidation and violence is swift and exact justice,” the governor said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Antifa militant claims Portland bank fire</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.foxnews.com/us/anonymous-leftist-militant-claims-portland-bank-fire-revenge-atlanta-arrests-long-live-anarchy">https://www.foxnews.com/us/anonymous-leftist-militant-claims-portland-bank-fire-revenge-atlanta-arrests-long-live-anarchy</a>
GIST	<p>An anonymous person reportedly <a href="#">affiliated with Antifa</a> has claimed responsibility for a recent fire at a bank in Portland, Oregon, as retaliation for the recent arrests of five alleged domestic terrorists in Atlanta.</p> <p>A two-alarm fire broke out at the Bank of America branch on Southeast 37th Avenue and Southeast Hawthorne Boulevard in southeast Portland at 3:15 a.m. on Dec. 31, <a href="#">according to local KGW8</a>.</p>

No injuries were reported at the scene and the Portland Fire Investigations Unit is still investigating the cause of the fire, but Portland police confirmed that it is being investigated as arson, according to the outlet.

An anonymous person with apparent ties to Antifa subsequently assumed responsibility for the incident, as reported by journalist Andy Ngo.

"Last night I broke into a Bank of America in Portland, Oregon and started a large fire. According to news reports, the fire grew quickly and took firefighters more than an hour to extinguish," read the individual's statement, which was posted to the blog [Abolition Media](#).

"I attack for revenge against capital for the hell it creates, to break the illusion of police control that usually protects it, and just because I can," the statement continued.

"Bank of America funds the [Atlanta Police Foundation](#) and a thousand other projects of control. Earlier that day, the six friends in Atlanta charged with 'domestic terrorism' were released from jail. May this fire bring them some warmth in winter," the post added.

"Long live anarchy!" the post concluded.

The [Portland Police Bureau](#) told Fox News Digital that investigators "are considering any and all potential evidence as they pursue the suspect or suspects in the recent bank arson that caused significant damage to the building."

The post on Abolition Media noted the anonymous communiqué was first posted on "[Scenes from the Atlanta Forest](#)," a blog referring to left-wing resistance against the future site of a police training center in the woods outside Atlanta.

The Georgia Bureau of Investigation (GBI) [conducted a raid](#) on Dec. 13 at a location referred to as the Autonomous Zone near the forested location of the future Atlanta Public Safety Training Center.

The location had been occupied by far-left extremists who had traveled from other parts of the country in an attempt to prevent the construction of the facility.

Five individuals were arrested at a protest at the location after protesters threw rocks at police cars and attacked EMT workers with rocks and bottles at a fire station near the site, according to a Dec. 14 [press release](#) from the GBI.

The GBI reported that during the raid they discovered explosive devices and gasoline.

Serena Abby Hertel, 25, Leonard Voiselle, 20, Nicholas Dean Olson, 25, Francis M. Carroll, 22, and Arieon Robinson, 21, were arrested and charged with [domestic terrorism](#) and other offenses.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Central Somalia car bombings kill 9</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2023/01/04/Nine-killed-in-central-Somalia-car-bombings-">https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2023/01/04/Nine-killed-in-central-Somalia-car-bombings-</a>
GIST	<p>At least nine people were killed, and several others wounded, in simultaneous car bomb attacks in a town in central Somalia on Wednesday, security officials and witnesses said.</p> <p>“The terrorists attacked Mahas town this morning using vehicles loaded with explosives,” local security official Abdullahi Adan told AFP by phone.</p> <p>“They have targeted a civilian area and we have confirmed that nine people, all of them civilians, died in the two explosions.”</p>

	<p>The attack, blamed on al-Shabaab extremist fighters, took place in the Hiran region of central Somalia, where a major offensive was launched several months ago against the al-Qaeda- linked group.</p> <p>“The terrorists, after having (been) defeated, resorted to desperately targeting civilians, but this will not stop the will of the people to continue defeating them,” said Osman Nur, a police commander in Mahas.</p> <p>“They have killed innocent civilians in the explosions,” he added.</p> <p>Witnesses said the blasts occurred near a restaurant not far from a district administration building in Mahas.</p> <p>“I saw the dead bodies of nine civilians including women and children, this was a horrible attack,” said one witness, Adan Hassan.</p> <p>Somalia’s President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud has declared “all-out war” against al-Shabaab, which has been waging a bloody fight against the internationally-backed federal government for 15 years.</p> <p>Although forced out of the country’s main urban centers around 10 years ago, al-Shabaab remains entrenched in vast swathes of rural central and southern Somalia and continues to carry out deadly attacks in the face of the offensive.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 UK teen terror suspect ‘exploited’?</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63736944">https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-63736944</a>
GIST	<p>Evidence showing the grooming and sexual exploitation of a schoolgirl was handed to MI5 months before she was charged with terrorism offences, a BBC investigation has found.</p> <p>The prosecution of Rhianan Rudd was later dropped after the Home Office concluded she was a victim of exploitation.</p> <p>Rhianan, who was 15 when she became the youngest girl charged with terror offences in the UK, took her own life in a children's home in May 2022.</p> <p>Her mother says investigators should have treated her daughter "as a victim rather than a terrorist".</p> <p>The case raises questions about how the UK deals with the problem of children involved in extremism, according to the senior lawyer responsible for reviewing terror laws.</p> <p>At the age of 14, Rhianan Rudd became absorbed by right-wing extremism. Her mother Emily Carter remembers her as a "lovely girl" who adored horses. But then she began to express racist and antisemitic beliefs, Ms Carter says.</p> <p>"If you didn't have blonde hair and blue eyes - Aryan as they say - she didn't want to know you, you were an inferior race, you shouldn't have been alive," her mother recalls.</p> <p>She says her daughter was taking in extreme views "like a sponge". "She was changing herself, that's not Rhianan," she says. "She was a child who fixated on things."</p> <p>Rhianan, who was born in Essex and later moved to Derbyshire, had difficulty building relationships and "struggled in life", Ms Carter says. She was also diagnosed as autistic.</p> <p>Rhianan had run away from home in the past and there was social service involvement with the family. Her mother acknowledges she made mistakes but "always tried to do her best".</p>

By September 2020, Ms Carter had become so concerned by Rhianan's mindset that she referred her to Prevent, the government de-radicalisation scheme, after she admitted downloading a bomb-making manual.

Within a month, Rhianan was arrested by counter-terror detectives and her brief engagement with Prevent had to end. She was questioned, bailed as a terrorism suspect, and was no longer able to attend school.

For some time, she had been talking to older people online, including American Christopher Cook, who promoted a terrorist form of neo-Nazism, and formed a combat cell to carry out attacks.

Evidence shows the then-partner of Rhianan's mother also had an influence. Ms Carter says this was kept from her.

The partner, American Dax Mallaburn, had been part of a white supremacist prison gang in the US. He met Rhianan's mother via a pen pal system for prisoners.

Before Rhianan was arrested, Mallaburn's relationship with her mother had broken down and he returned to the US. But the BBC has discovered that Cook and Mallaburn had been in contact, with Cook telling him to teach Rhianan the "right way".

During police interviews, Rhianan described being coerced and groomed, including sexually, and having sent explicit images of herself to Cook. The abuse she described would eventually result in a formal government finding of exploitation.

Under modern slavery laws, certain public bodies like the police are required to notify the Home Office about any potential victims of exploitation they encounter.

However, in the months before Rhianan was charged, none of the organisations involved referred her to the specialist Home Office unit that considers such cases.

This was not due to a lack of information.

The BBC has found that, around the time of Rhianan's arrest, MI5 received evidence showing she had been exploited - including sexually - by Cook.

An FBI investigation had uncovered messages and images from Cook's devices showing Rhianan being groomed, coerced and exploited. The FBI handed the material to MI5.

Rhianan spent over six months on bail waiting for a charging decision. Her mother says this period led to a decline in Rhianan's mental health, with instances of self-harm, running away, and attempted suicide. Derbyshire social services were involved and she was moved into care.

In April 2021, more than six months after the arrest, she was charged with six terrorism offences for having earlier possessed instructions for making explosives and weapons. Prosecutors alleged one set of instructions were connected to a potential planned attack.

Days after she was charged, when newly-appointed defence lawyers intervened, Derbyshire Council referred Rhianan to the Home Office as a possible victim of exploitation.

It took a further seven months for a decision to be made. When it came, the Home Office concluded she had been trafficked and exploited.

In late December 2021 the prosecution was halted.

Rhianan is part of a trend of growing numbers of children, often involved in online right-wing extremism, being investigated by MI5 and police.

Convictions in the past two years include a Cornish boy who led his own online terror cell aged 14 and a boy from Darlington arrested aged 13.

In the case of another boy, a pre-sentence report from experts said it was "likely that he did not see the wider ramifications of his activities, now seamlessly replaced apparently by interests such as Dad's Army".

Cases involving children are complex. A child might have been groomed and exploited, but nevertheless pose a genuine risk of harm to other people.

Debates about trafficking and exploitation are also taking place in immigration cases concerning young women appealing the removal of their British citizenship after they went to Syria to join the Islamic State group.

In the case of Shamima Begum, who travelled aged 15, the government has argued against claims of trafficking and said she is a security threat. Her lawyers say she was trafficked and sexually exploited.

Few children who are charged with terror offences end up being imprisoned. The process of investigation, arrest and prosecution can take many months, and well over a year in some cases.

Jonathan Hall KC, the independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, says that in 2020/2021 only one child who committed a terrorism offence was jailed, with all the others "eventually given non-custodial sentences".

He says the question needs to be asked about whether the current approach is effective. He suggests changes in the law that would allow police to say to a child terror suspect that they would either be prosecuted or they could accept an injunction. He says these could, for example, limit mobile phone use, require the use of monitoring software and engagement with a mentor.

"That can be done really quickly, and keep them out of the criminal justice system altogether," he says.

Rhianan's mother thinks her daughter should never have been charged.

She says police "obviously" have to investigate and search for evidence, but she believes they should have subsequently dealt with it "completely differently".

"They should have seen her as a victim rather than a terrorist. She's a child, an autistic child. She should have been treated as a child that had been groomed and sexually exploited."

A government spokesperson told the BBC: "MI5 takes its responsibilities in relation to those who may be at risk of harm very seriously.

"In accordance with long-standing government policy, MI5 can neither confirm nor deny involvement in individual cases.

"More generally, if in the course of work to protect national security someone in MI5 obtains information that an individual is or may become at risk of death or serious harm, this will be passed to the relevant authorities."

Cook, the American who exploited Rhianan, has pleaded guilty in the US to a neo-Nazi terrorist plot along with others to destroy a power grid. He had been on bail awaiting sentencing.

But the BBC has established that the court in Ohio only recently became aware of Cook's predatory conduct towards Rhianan, which had not been part of the original case against him despite the FBI's long-standing knowledge of his abuse. After the court learned of his behaviour, Cook was placed in custody in December ahead of sentencing.

After the prosecution of Rhianan was abandoned, she chose to continue living in her Nottinghamshire children's home and began engaging with the Prevent scheme.

But there were signs that all was not well.

In the weeks before her death, Rhianan asked her mother to help her contact a neo-Nazi extremist in the US. Her mother reported it to the children's home, which is run by private firm Blue Mountain Homes. She says she was then told social services and police had decided to let contact take place. It is unclear if it did.

Her mother had warned Derbyshire Council about the risk of Rhianan taking her own life. In emails to a social worker in 2021, she wrote: "I hope she doesn't try kill herself when in her room on her own."

She stated in the emails that Rhianan had access to ligatures.

Ms Carter says she saw Rhianan days before her death and was so concerned by her appearance that she contacted the home.

She says she warned staff that her daughter was "going to do something" and asked them to watch her. The manager said they would "find out what's going on" and told her not to worry, she says.

But later that week, she says, three police officers were "standing in my living room telling me that my daughter died by hanging".

In Rhianan's room at the children's home, access to items that could be used as ligatures were banned due to the risk of self-harm and suicide, but she gained access to one.

Aged 16, she was found dead in May over 12 hours after she retired to her room the night before.

An inquest is due to take place into her death. No date has been set.

The organisations contacted by the BBC said they could not comment on the details of our investigation until the inquest is complete.

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HEADLINE	01/03 NYPD: attack linked to Islamic extremism
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/us/new-years-eve-attack-new-york-police-linked-islamist-extremism-2023-01-03/">https://www.reuters.com/world/us/new-years-eve-attack-new-york-police-linked-islamist-extremism-2023-01-03/</a>
GIST	<p>Jan 3 (Reuters) - The teenager accused of attacking three policemen with a machete on New Year's Eve near Times Square and charged with attempted murder was linked to Islamist extremism, a senior New York City Police Department official said on Tuesday.</p> <p>"He knew what he was doing. He knew why he was doing it and he thought he would die in the attack," Thomas Galati, the department's chief of intelligence and counterterrorism, told <a href="#">ABC News</a> in an interview on Tuesday. "He did yell out 'Allahu Akbar.'" The Arabic expression means "God is Great."</p> <p>The FBI interviewed the suspect, Trevor Bickford, last month in Maine after his mother reported her concern that her son was possibly becoming radicalized, Galati said. Agents determined that Bickford wanted to fight in Afghanistan and placed him on a federal watch list to prevent him from traveling overseas.</p>



"He is not representing, you know, the Islamic religion but rather, you know, a very, very small percentage of people that get radicalized," Galati added.

On Monday, police said Bickford, 19, came from Wells, Maine, and said he had been charged with attempted murder and attempted assault.

New York City rang in the new year in [typical style](#) on Saturday with its famous ball drop celebration in Times Square.

The attack, which officials say was unprovoked, took place before midnight outside a secure area set up for New Year's Eve celebrations.

All three officers who were attacked had been released from hospital by Monday. One of the officers shot the suspect, hitting him in the shoulder. The suspect was then taken into custody, police said.

Before the attack, Bickford wrote a farewell letter to his mother in a diary, according to the New York Times report quoting a law enforcement official.

"I fear greatly you will not repent to Allah and therefore I hold hope in my heart that a piece of you believes so that you may be taken out of the hellfire," the Times quoted Bickford as writing.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/02 Concern: terrorism trends for 2023</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/featured/7-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2023/">https://www.hstoday.us/featured/7-terrorism-trends-to-watch-in-2023/</a>
GIST	<p>Just five years ago, a year-ahead terror outlook would have largely focused on the threat posed by lone actors operating out of allegiance to Islamist terror groups. After all, 2017 saw the retaking of Mosul and Raqqa as ISIS struggled to hold on to its physical caliphate, as well as the Westminster Bridge and London Bridge vehicular attacks, the Manchester Arena suicide bombing, the Barcelona attacks, the Hudson River Park bike path truck attack in Manhattan, the New York subway pipe bombing, and more. But that year also gave glimpses of the evolving terror landscape to come with the neo-Nazi vehicle attack on opponents in Charlottesville, the shooting of GOP lawmakers practicing for the annual Congressional Baseball Game, the sword murder in New York by a Maryland white supremacist who said he wanted “racial world war,” and the racially motivated shooting of Indian engineers in Olathe, Kansas.</p> <p>Fast-forward to 2022, and the attacks and perpetrators as well as the makeup of the extremists waiting in the wings reflects the growing complexity of the terror landscape, the ideological “hodgepodge” as <a href="#">termed</a> by FBI Director Christopher Wray, and the threat diversity that complicates efforts to intercept plots in the planning stages. There was the grocery store mass shooting targeting a Black neighborhood in Buffalo, the mass shooting targeting an LGBTQ nightclub in Colorado Springs, the attacks on two power substations in North Carolina that plunged tens of thousands of residents into darkness, and the Colleyville synagogue attack by a hostage-taker who traveled from Britain — at the beginning of a year that saw an escalation in antisemitic incidents. And to close out the year, a 19-year-old from a small Maine town who <a href="#">reportedly</a> dreamed of joining the Taliban is accused of attacking three NYPD officers with a machete outside a Times Square security checkpoint on New Year’s Eve.</p> <p>The hodgepodge of diverse and dynamic threats in the coming year requires unraveling some key areas of concern:</p> <p><b>Copycats</b></p> <p>Out of the attacks in 2022, two stood out as explicitly stating that inspiration for their attacks came from other killers before them: Payton Gendron, the Buffalo supermarket killer who <a href="#">declared</a> in a manifesto that Christchurch mosque shooter Brenton Tarrant’s livestream “started everything you see here,” and Juraj Krajcik, who killed two people outside of a Bratislava LGBTQ bar in October and <a href="#">stated</a> in his own manifesto that his “two inspirations to carry out an operation” were Tarrant and Poway synagogue shooter John Earnest — but the “final nail in the coffin” was Gendron, who “gave me the final nudge, allowing me</p>

to overcome my own indecision and begin seriously working towards carrying out an operation.” Both Gendron and Krajcik were hailed by accelerationists as “disciples” of Tarrant and as “saints” — in which accelerationists “canonize” white killers who meet certain criteria including deliberate intent, motive, inflicting at least one death, and having a neo-Nazi, white nationalist, or far-right anti-system worldview.

The copycat threat is about emulation, recognition, and passing the baton to the next killer. It’s not unique to domestic terrorists: After the 2016 Pulse nightclub shooting, ISIS adherents offered a CD-ROM package of all photos, memes, video, and ISIS articles related to killer Omar Mateen in a push for others to copy his heinous crime. The al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula *Inspire* “Praise & Guide” series has reviewed attacks such as the [2021 Boulder supermarket mass shooting](#) to assess what was done well by the attacker and what could have been done to inflict more harm.

Regardless of the ideological affiliation, the extremist encouragement for would-be terrorists to copy other killers is at its core a push for them to take the crimes one step further — whether with a higher death toll, greater damage to infrastructure, a longer livestream, new tactics or weapons, or an especially symbolic target. Recent accelerationist [encouragement to copy](#) the 2019 El Paso Walmart mass shooting, for example, suggested “a Crusius-style attack” on an establishment at which migrants are present “every week. A sniper shooting every day, slowly taking its toll.”

### **Critical Infrastructure Systems**

A banner draped from an overpass in Moore County, N.C., a couple weeks after an outage sparked by saboteurs declared “bring it all down” along with neo-Nazi imagery and a link to the neo-Nazi accelerationist National Socialist Resistance Front. After rounds fired at two substations in the county Dec. 3 knocked out power to 40,000 homes and businesses for days, accelerationists cheered the incident and encouraged more attacks on electricity infrastructure. But it was hardly a new call for action:

One [accelerationist handbook](#) circulated last summer called for shooters to bypass softer targets in favor of causing chaotic blackouts by emulating on a broader scale an unsolved 2013 sniper attack on a California transmission substation. A larger subsequent handbook released by accelerationists contained attack threats, tips, or encouragement directed at critical infrastructure sectors, from short memes to detailed instruction. Their messaging is consistent: Infrastructure attacks from small acts of sabotage to larger and well-supplied team operations can be committed with a range of methods and skill levels, and can deliver blows — accelerationists hope — to stability and continuity while terrorizing the population.

But while focusing on the vulnerability of substations and the devastating impact that widespread or extended power outages can have on a community, it’s also a time to think beyond electricity because adversaries definitely are exploring those options. The Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency classifies [16 critical infrastructure sectors](#) “considered so vital to the United States that their incapacitation or destruction would have a debilitating effect on security, national economic security, national public health or safety”: the chemical sector, communications, dams, emergency services, financial services, government facilities, information technology, transportation systems, commercial facilities, critical manufacturing, defense industrial base, energy, food and agriculture, healthcare, nuclear reactors/materials, and water and wastewater systems. That larger accelerationist guide, for example, discussed [ways to attack trains](#), cell towers, trucks and depots, water treatment and distribution, commercial business, communications, electrical systems, HVAC systems, and roads, bridges and highways. The guide stated that attackers are aiming for two types of impact: “the suffering your target will withstand, including the cost associated with restoring itself,” and “the heightened security on the local and national level in reaction to the demonstrable damage that can be done toward this target.”

### **Mainstreaming Extremism**

In July 2019, HSToday [reported](#) on flyers signed by Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and dropped in front of homes during overnight runs outside D.C. in Loudoun County, Va. The leaflets decried a grassroots push to rename Harry Flood Byrd Highway (Virginia State Route 7), named for the late segregationist governor and senator, declaring “leave our history and heroes alone” and “preserve our culture.” They added a plug to “kontakt the experts” — attempting to seize on highly charged debates about whether historical monuments should be removed or sites renamed. They saw an opportunity for a

bridge issue: an issue that extremists exploit in order to bring others closer to their side by luring new recruits, to bring their side closer to others in an attempt to move their ideology or group into the mainstream, or to simply gain tacit sympathizers and people passionate about the issue who may be willing to look the other way at a new ally's hateful core beliefs.

Recently, neo-Nazis and white supremacist groups have been trying to make drag-queen events including brunches, fundraisers, and story hours their own bridge issue, demonstrating outside of drag shows with banners and Nazi salutes, chanting at passersby and harassing attendees, and posting photos and videos of their actions online. First and foremost, these groups would like to woo recruits with these public-facing displays. But also important to them are those who, as seen on social media, will laud the groups for taking some sort of action even if they personally don't ascribe to all of the group's views or openly call themselves allies. Groups who have been protesting have also celebrated violent acts inflicted upon the LGBTQ community, so it can be a short bridge to cross from verbal harassment to either perpetrating or inspiring future acts of violence.

We also saw this past year with the mainstreaming of antisemitism how latent prejudices can build bridges between vocal extremists and those who have become willing to defend that bias. The year ended with scores of online memes lauding Ye's antisemitic comments and Hitler praise as neo-Nazi creators even photoshopped the rapper into Third Reich regalia. Mainstreaming can make extremism worse both in terms of recruitment — if more people see ascribing to the ideology as now hip or acceptable — and when it comes to convincing more people to look the other way at the deeds of domestic extremist movements that declare they're acting for the betterment of society in one breath and then call for the extermination of Blacks and Jews in the next.

“A full 63 percent of religious hate crimes are motivated by antisemitism — targeting a group that makes up just 2.4 percent of our population,” FBI Director Wray [said](#) in November. “Foreign terrorist organizations like ISIS have promoted antisemitic violent extremism for decades. They continue to target Jewish Americans in their attack plots. But we also confront the threat of people here, on our soil, whose hateful views — often paraded online — boil over into acts of violence.”

### **Islamist Extremist Evolution**

ISIS and al-Qaeda both suffered the loss of their top leaders in 2022, with ISIS leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashemi al-Qurayshi killing himself during a U.S. raid in February and his successor Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi killing himself during a Free Syrian Army operation in October, and al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri dying in a U.S. drone strike on his home in Afghanistan in July. As martyrdom aspirations are baked into their operating philosophies, Islamist terror groups are prepared to move to the next leader in line and, while losing a figurehead, could view the transitions as a chance to inject younger blood into the upper ranks.

As U.S. Central Command noted in its [year-end report](#) of operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, the fight against this group in its post-caliphate era is far from over. First, there are the provinces that have entrenched in regions around the globe, “most significantly” in Afghanistan and Africa. Then there are the ISIS operatives still being fought in Iraq and Syria — there was nearly an operation per day last year by CENTCOM against these forces. Then there is “a literal ‘ISIS army’ in detention” in Iraq and Syria consisting of more than 30,000 ISIS leaders and fighters. And there are the more than 25,000 children in Syria's al-Hol camp who are in danger of being radicalized by ISIS and forming the next generation of fighters — or cubs, in ISIS lingo.

While this occurs in the military operations sphere, ISIS, al-Qaeda, and other Islamist extremist movements continue to utilize distance recruitment and training in order to inspire operatives in any corner of the world. Much of the ISIS propaganda that circulates nowadays is recycled “greatest hits” material, so to speak, with fresh content regularly produced in a weekly newsletter from the core of the group and magazines and videos largely produced by provinces. These publications have mostly concentrated on regional grievances, recruitment, and incitement, but have also added international elements whether in promotion of other claimed ISIS provinces or inciting attacks in the West. ISIS and al-Qaeda both expressed delight after the Jan. 6 Capitol riot and have sought to egg on extremism from the sidelines ever

since. Over the past year, ISIS Khorasan in Afghanistan [declared](#) the United States a “banana republic” ripe for an “Islamic storm” after the execution of a search warrant at former President Trump’s Mar-a-Lago residence, [called](#) mass shootings and other gun violence in America an “‘unwanted’ population control program” and divine “tit for tat,” [echoed](#) the QAnon belief that a cabal of pedophiles is rooted in Hollywood and the government, [called](#) “social media warfare” critical to counter the pull of “enchanted” social media influencers, and [declared](#) that disseminating and weaponizing disinformation is a “duty” of jihadists.

### **Blurred Ideological Lines**

See the hodgepodge above. Or, wade into online channels and chat forums where accelerationists are distributing ISIS videos because they admire the tactical advice and the jihadists’ passion and ruthlessness, or where posters who claim jihadist underpinnings are lauding the lone-wolf nature and execution of school shooters and replay surveillance videos capturing their brutal attacks ad nauseam. Throw in some ecofascism, incel culture, anti-government extremism, conspiracy theory extremism, antisemitism, anarchism, or neo-Nazism, add in extremists professing to be Christian or pagans or even occultists, and you have everything that is and isn’t a comprehensive threat profile. The Pulse nightclub attack may have been claimed by a killer saying that he was operating on behalf of ISIS, but it’s now hailed by domestic extremists as a model for striking at the LGBTQ community. ISIS admired the 2017 massacre at the Route 91 Harvest country music festival in Las Vegas so much that the group claimed for months that shooter Stephen Paddock was “a soldier of the Islamic State who carried out the attack in response to calls for targeting coalition countries,” even as it became readily apparent that Paddock had no apparent ideological motive. The Taliban victory in Afghanistan has been hailed over the past year by domestic extremists who want to bring down the government in the United States.

“The old-school world of kind of people with some purity of radical ideology then turning to violence is often giving way to people who have kind of a jumble of mixed-up ideas,” Wray [told](#) the Senate Appropriations on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies in May. “And, you know, we’ve seen cases where somebody one month is saying they’re an ISIS supporter, and then the next month they say they’re a white supremacist.”

And while extremists explore all the streams of extremism and cobble together their unique extremist profiles, tutorials including guides on how to construct weapons and explosives and inspirational materials from ideological movements that may not seem to align are shared online in furtherance of extremist beliefs turning to violent action.

### **Tactical Diversity**

While extremists explore their ideological profiles, groups and movements are also trying to reach extremists where they’re at in terms of skills and ability to conduct attacks. ISIS propaganda, for example, encouraged traditional bomb-making and weapons training early on, but as the group and its focus on lone actors who would never journey to the physical caliphate evolved ISIS was suggesting any novel attack method that might stick — from posing as a Craigslist landlord to lure victims to utilizing poisonous plants or venomous snakes to snap their foes. The crux of this see-what-sticks strategy was to encourage terrorists to get creative — not getting caught in the planning stages buying bomb ingredients or plowing through hundreds of rounds at the range — and also to meet potential attackers where they’re at if they have circumstances such as not being able to obtain a firearm or build an IED.

Domestic extremists also have been promoting the myriad ways in which adherents who have limited or exceptional skills can support their goals of infrastructure sabotage, striking high-value targets, or killing perceived racial, religious, or political foes. Neo-Nazi accelerationists lauded William Mallet, a 69-year-old retired train operator who killed three members of the Kurdish community and wounded three more in a Paris shooting Dec. 23, for finally acting on how he “always wanted to assassinate migrants and foreigners,” [according to](#) statements he gave to detectives after his arrest.

While trying to bring terror attacks down to the level of attainable goals, extremist groups are also reaching high with stated aspirations to utilize chemical, biological, or radiological agents to some degree.

Dirty bombs were called holy grails in the aforementioned 261-page accelerationist guide because of the potential for higher casualty counts and larger-scale disruption or chaos intended to further their goals.

### Political Violence

Midterm elections in late 2022 thankfully did not see the sort of violence that could reasonably have been expected with heated contests, hotter rhetoric, and close vote tallies. But anti-government extremism, violence or threats [centered around a specific political issue](#), violence or threats against politicians or election workers, and accelerationist ideology that believes in destruction of the current system are in motion whether or not there is an election just around the corner. And with the second anniversary of the attack on the U.S. Capitol days away, there are still 438 of 909 cases against Jan. 6 defendants still pending in the courts, according to the GWU Program on Extremism's [Capitol siege tracker](#), amid claims by some defendants and their supporters that they are "political prisoners."

The concern is at what point fury directed at the government itself or the players boils over into violence, and whether or not a specific catalyst — such as the certification of votes happening that Jan. 6 — is even needed to push a potential attacker to that breaking point. This could manifest in attacks on government facilities or think tanks, political offices such as the Capitol Hill [pipe bombs](#), facilities tied to specific hot-button issues, or people — as seen in the October break-in and hammer attack on Paul Pelosi. The man accused of assaulting the husband of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) at their San Francisco home allegedly [compared](#) himself to a Revolutionary War fighter battling "tyranny" and told law enforcement that he intended to interrogate and likely break the kneecaps of Speaker Pelosi to "show other members of Congress there were consequences to actions."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 USAO: 'this is a crime of terrorism'</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270725017.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270725017.html</a>
GIST	<p>Two men charged in the Christmas Day attacks on four Pierce County substations, which knocked out power for thousands, appeared in U.S. District Court in Tacoma for the first time on Tuesday following their holiday weekend arrests.</p> <p>Matthew Greenwood, 32, and Jeremy Crahan, 40, both of Puyallup, each face up to 20 years on a charge of conspiracy to damage energy facilities. Greenwood faces an additional charge of possessing unregistered firearms, carrying a penalty of up to 10 years in prison, because law enforcement seized two unregistered, short-barrel guns from his residence.</p> <p>"This is a crime of terrorism," assistant U.S. attorney Stephen Hobbs said in court Tuesday.</p> <p>Federal and local law enforcement arrested Greenwood and Crahan on Dec. 31 and booked them into the Federal Detention Center at SeaTac following multiple days of FBI surveillance.</p> <p>Chief Magistrate Judge Richard Creatura will decide during upcoming hearings whether the defendants should be held without bail pending trial at the request of federal prosecutors, who cited an anti-terrorism measure and the risk the defendants could flee or obstruct the case outside custody.</p> <p>Creatura ordered federal public defenders to be assigned to represent the defendants based on their finances. Lance Hester of Tacoma-based Hester Law Group is representing Crahan because the Office of the Federal Public Defender can't represent two co-defendants. Assistant federal public defender Rebecca Fish represented Greenwood on Tuesday.</p> <p>More than 15,000 Puget Sound Energy and Tacoma Power customers lost power early Christmas morning following attacks on substations in South Hill, Elk Plain and Graham, according to charging papers. Damages at the latter two facilities, both owned by Tacoma Power, could cost nearly \$3 million and take three years to fix.</p>



	<p>After his arrest on Saturday, Greenwood told investigators he and Crahan planned the power disruptions to aid a burglary, according to charging papers. Greenwood said they broke into a local business affected by the power outage and stole from the cash register.</p> <p>The men also are suspected of damaging a Puget Sound Energy substation in Kapowsin later in the evening on Christmas, according to charging papers.</p> <p>Court records for Greenwood and Crahan show multiple convictions related to fraud, theft and burglary in Pierce County but no histories of violent crime. Public records also showed a Roy address for Crahan and an eviction proceeding against Greenwood in Graham.</p> <p>Both men will appear in court together on Jan. 17 after Creatura gives a pretrial detention ruling.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/03 IS claims Kabul checkpoint bombing</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/islamic-state-claims-afghanistan-airport-checkpoint-bombing-96169714">https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/islamic-state-claims-afghanistan-airport-checkpoint-bombing-96169714</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>ISLAMABAD -- The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for a bombing near a checkpoint at the Afghan capital's military airport that killed and wounded several people.</p> <p>IS said in a statement late Tuesday that Sunday's attack on the checkpoint in Kabul was carried out by the same member who took part in an assault on a hotel in the capital in mid-December.</p> <p>The regional affiliate of the Islamic State group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province — has increased its attacks in Afghanistan since the Taliban takeover in 2021. Targets have included Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority.</p> <p>IS published a photo of the attacker identifying him as Abdul Jabbar, saying he withdrew safely from the attack on the hotel after he ran out of ammunition. It added he detonated his explosives-laden vest targeting the soldiers gathered at the checkpoint.</p> <p>The military airport is around 200 meters from the civilian airport and close to the Interior Ministry, itself the site of a suicide bombing last October that killed at least four people.</p> <p>Interior Ministry spokesman Abdul Nafi Takor said after the attack that the blast left “several” people dead and wounded. He gave no exact figures or further information about the bombing, saying details of an investigation will be shared later.</p> <p>Takor and Khalid Zadran, spokesman for the Kabul police chief, didn't respond Wednesday to requests for casualty figures.</p> <p>Although Taliban security forces prevented photography and filming directly at the blast site, the checkpoint appeared damaged but intact. It is on Airport Road, which leads to high-security neighborhoods housing government ministries, foreign embassies and the presidential palace.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/03 Brooklyn subway attacker pleads guilty</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/nyregion/terrorism-brooklyn-subway-shooting.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/03/nyregion/terrorism-brooklyn-subway-shooting.html</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>Charged with shooting 10 people last April in one of the worst attacks in recent years on the New York subway, Frank R. James shuffled slowly into federal court in Brooklyn on Tuesday afternoon, escorted by three federal marshals.</p> <p>Mr. James, 63, calmly put on a pair of glasses, reviewed a folder of documents and in a clear, calm, resolute voice began pleading guilty to an indictment charging him with a firearms offense and 10 counts of terrorist attack — one for each of the people struck in the subway shooting.</p>



“Guilty,” Mr. James stated repeatedly, prompted each time by Judge William F. Kuntz asking in a distinctive baritone how he wanted to plead.

Breon S. Peace, the U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, said in a statement that the relatively speedy resolution of the case would be a deterrent.

“James’s crimes of violence have been met with swift justice,” he said. “This guilty plea is an important step towards holding James fully accountable and helping the victims of the defendant’s violence and our great city heal.”

Mr. James faces a possible life sentence, but the judge said he would consider a shorter term, at which point a disagreement emerged between prosecutors and the defense as to the proper calculation of Mr. James’ estimated sentencing guidelines.

Prosecutors’ estimate was between roughly 32 and 37 years in prison if Mr. James fully accepted responsibility for his crime. It was 40 years to life without such acceptance.

But Mr. James’ defense attorneys, arguing that the guidelines should be roughly half that, called prosecutors’ guidelines unjust.

In a statement after the court appearance, Mr. James’s lawyers, Mia Eisner-Grynberg and Amanda David, noted that he had “has accepted responsibility for his crimes since he turned himself in to law enforcement.”

They said that prosecutors’ sentencing request proves that “even a sentence that would vastly exceed Mr. James’s natural life is not enough for them.”

Mr. James, a heavyset, balding man dressed in a long tan shirt and pants, sat alongside his two public defenders as he confirmed what happened April 12.

During the morning rush hour that day, the authorities said, Mr. James opened fire on an N train in Brooklyn.

No one was killed, but the attack set off a 31-hour manhunt, unnerving New Yorkers as law enforcement combed the city looking for Mr. James. The police finally seized him in the East Village in Manhattan after several people — including Mr. James himself — called a police tip line to report his whereabouts.

The shooting spree, which came as subway ridership had begun to tick up after plummeting during the pandemic, once again underscored the vulnerability of the transit system, and New Yorkers’ concerns over crime and safety. It also put a spotlight on the city’s gap in mental health care.

Mr. James, who has been detained since his arrest at a jail in Brooklyn near the subway station where the attack took place, has a history of mental illness, according to his lawyers.

On Tuesday, Judge Kuntz slowly read aloud the lengthy, detailed charges and repeatedly asked Mr. James if he clearly understood his decision to forgo a trial and plead guilty.

“Yes, I do,” Mr. James repeated. Partly to gauge his mental clarity, the judge asked about his childhood.

Sounding like a reasonable passenger seated next to you on the subway rather than someone who terrorized it, Mr. James described his Bronx upbringing attending P.S. 54 and then DeWitt Clinton High School “somewhat,” before earning an equivalency diploma.

He grew apart from his family, moving to but never settling in several cities, including Philadelphia, Newark, N.J., Chicago and Milwaukee. He had a history of arrests in New York and New Jersey.

In the weeks before the shooting, Mr. James had posted combative videos on social media, in which he ranted about the city's subway system and its approach to crime. But there was no clear motive for the subway attack, according to the authorities.

Mr. James had reserved and paid for a U-Haul van in Philadelphia the week before the attack, according to the authorities, driving it into Brooklyn before dawn that day and parking it there before entering the subway system.

At the judge's direction, he outlined the shooting, describing his travel to board the N train at the Kings Highway station. He said he began shooting with the intent to "cause serious bodily injury" to passengers but no intent to actually kill anyone.

This gave Judge Kuntz pause, and he asked the prosecution for a reaction.

Sara K. Winik, an assistant U.S. attorney, cast doubt on Mr. James's claim and said the prosecution was fully prepared to prove Mr. James' guilt at trial, as well as establish that the attack was the culmination of lengthy planning.

The bullet trajectories were those of a gunman shooting to kill, and smoke bombs that he set off were meant to confuse helpless passengers, she said.

She added that as far back as 2017, Mr. James began buying items used in the attack, and that he also conducted a "trial run" attack before the real one.

Finally, the judge read each of the 11 charges and asked Mr. James how he pleaded. Again, Mr. James, showing no discernible emotion repeated, clearly and calmly, one word.

"Guilty."

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## Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	01/04 NKorea's next leader?
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/04/world/asia/north-korea-daughter-succession.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/04/world/asia/north-korea-daughter-succession.html</a>
GIST	<p>North Korean state media has not revealed much about the cherub-faced young girl who has made several appearances with Kim Jong-un, the country's leader, in recent weeks.</p> <p>On New Year's Day, state media carried <a href="#">undated photos</a> of her and Mr. Kim visiting a nuclear missile facility. Her age and name have not yet been reported; she has simply been referred to as Mr. Kim's "most beloved daughter."</p> <p>That was enough to raise questions about the young girl's place in the Kim family dynasty and whether she was being groomed as Mr. Kim's successor.</p> <p>North Korea is not a monarchy. Its top leader is supposedly elected through a ruling Workers' Party congress. In reality, though, the Kims have run the country like a private family enterprise since its founding at the end of World War II.</p> <p>Both Mr. Kim's grandfather and father ruled until they died. Mr. Kim, who turns 39 next Monday, has already been in power for 11 years and is unlikely to go anywhere any time soon.</p>

Yet the question of who would inherit the regime — and [its fast-growing nuclear arsenal](#) — has remained the subject of endless fascination among officials and analysts, especially when [doubts about Mr. Kim's health](#) have emerged.

The speculation of North Korea's succession plans unfolded as Seoul and Washington said this week that they were [discussing](#) how to better cope with North Korea's growing nuclear threat, employing the full range of American defense capabilities.

The recent guessing game about succession first began after North Korea launched its [Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile](#) on Nov. 18 in one of the country's most significant weapons tests.

The following day, North Korean state media reported that Mr. Kim watched the launch with [his daughter](#), and released photos of the girl in a white padded jacket, holding Mr. Kim's hand as they walked around the testing site.

Days later, the National Intelligence Agency of South Korea identified the young girl as Kim Ju-ae, the baby that retired N.B.A. star Dennis Rodman said he was allowed to hold when he met Mr. Kim in Pyongyang in 2013.

Ju-ae's public appearance marked the first time Pyongyang confirmed that Mr. Kim had a child. Until her debut in state media, ordinary North Koreans had never seen any of Mr. Kim's children.

South Korean intelligence officials have said that Mr. Kim has three children, with the eldest likely being a son. Ju-ae is his second child, believed to be 9 or 10, they said.

Outside analysts quickly noted that she was described as “beloved” and had been chosen to represent the next generation of the Kim family. They were also intrigued by Mr. Kim's decision to introduce her at a missile test site, highlighting the link between the Kim family and the North's weapons program.

The speculation around succession deepened when Ju-ae joined her father again, this time in late November for [a group photo](#) with missile engineers. She was dressed more formally for the occasion, with a long black coat and fur collar, her hand nestled on her father's shoulder as he sat in front of the crowd of cheering engineers. Top generals bowed before her.

“The photos are likely part of a carefully worked out program to show to North Koreans that Kim Ju-ae is going to become the successor,” said Cheong Seong-chang, a longtime researcher of the Kim family at the Sejong Institute in South Korea.

If Mr. Kim chose a daughter over a son as his heir apparent, it would be a highly unusual move in deeply patriarchal North Korea. But Mr. Kim himself was an unlikely choice to become the leader of the country. As the youngest of three sons, Mr. Kim leapfrogged over his brothers when his father, Kim Jong-il, recognized his domineering attitude and tapped him as successor, according to analysts.

And although the North's leadership is predominantly male, the regime under Mr. Kim includes a few prominent women, such as the outspoken anchorwoman [Ri Chun-hee](#), Foreign Minister Choe Son-hui and Mr. Kim's [sister and spokeswoman](#) Kim Yo-jong, who has issued a stream of belligerent threats against South Korea in recent months.

By revealing a possible successor early on, Mr. Kim may be trying to avoid the mistakes his father made, some analysts said.

Kim Jong-il anointed Mr. Kim as heir when the son was still a child, but he kept it secret outside of his inner circle. Many analysts had speculated that [Kim Jong-nam](#) — the senior Kim's eldest son and Mr. Kim's half brother — would become his successor. Others said the father would pick Kim Jong-chol, Mr. Kim's elder brother. Some even said the hereditary succession in North Korea would end with Kim Jong-il's death.

Only after the father had a stroke in 2008 did North Korea [start hinting](#) that Mr. Kim was the chosen successor. Ordinary North Koreans had never seen him until he appeared in state media in 2010.

When his father died in 2011, there was [much doubt](#), at home and abroad, about Mr. Kim's ability to lead. It took years before he established his [unchallenged authority](#) through a series of [bloody purges](#), including [the execution of his own uncle](#) and [the assassination of his half brother](#).

After he took power, Mr. Kim made his government and his family less secretive. His father was known for living with beautiful women, including Mr. Kim's mother, but never introduced them to the public. One of the first things Mr. Kim did as leader was to make a public appearance with his wife, [Ri Sol-ju](#).

By revealing a successor early, Mr. Kim may be "giving the successor enough time to prepare," Mr. Cheong said. "He wants his successor to avoid the hurried, fast-track succession at home and the skepticism from the outside that he had to go through."

Most analysts agreed that by taking one of his children to events related to his arsenal, Mr. Kim was reminding the North's people, especially [its youth](#), that his family's dynastic rule and nuclear weapons development would continue into the next generation.

But not everyone saw Ju-ae's presence as a sign that she had been elevated in the family. "It's premature to conclude that she is going to become the successor, especially if her father has a son," said Ahn Chan-il, a defector from North Korea who runs a research institute in Seoul.

Tae Yong-ho, a former North Korean diplomat who [fled](#) to South Korea in 2016 and is now a lawmaker in Seoul, [told reporters](#) that the world would know that Mr. Kim had chosen a successor only when the North started idolizing a particular child as a godlike figure, as they did with Mr. Kim once his succession was made formal.

Mr. Kim has been promoting and firing top officials like pieces on a chessboard, frequently reshuffling his government. Last week, Pak Jong-chon, a top military official, was replaced. Those maneuverings have kept observers guessing, but such speculation is forbidden in the North's tightly censored news media.

"North Koreans take hereditary rule by the Kim family for granted because they have never experienced free election," Mr. Ahn said. "They are less interested in who rules them but more interested in who will make their life better than Kim Jong-un has."

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Woman: Portland homelessness easy street</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://nypost.com/2023/01/03/portland-woman-says-homelessness-is-piece-of-cake-thanks-to-3-meals-lax-drug-policies-no-cops/">https://nypost.com/2023/01/03/portland-woman-says-homelessness-is-piece-of-cake-thanks-to-3-meals-lax-drug-policies-no-cops/</a>
GIST	<p>Portland's homeless population is livin' on easy street.</p> <p>A homeless woman who identified herself as Wendy last week told homeless activist Kevin Dahlgren that living on the streets is a breeze thanks to Oregon's lax drug policies and lack of police enforcement.</p> <p>"It's a piece of cake, really. I mean, that's why you probably got so many out here because they feed you three meals a day," Wendy told Dahlgren in a street interview. "They're loving us to death. You don't have to do shit but stay in your tent or party or if you smoke of a lot of dope you can do that."</p> <p>Dahlgren, who runs the nonprofit We Heart Seattle, wants to end homelessness by "empowering not enabling" others, thanked Wendy for her honesty before adding that Portland's approach doesn't seem to be "really helping anybody."</p> <p>"It's not," Wendy agreed. "That's why you see all the tents."</p>

In September, the state's Health Authority found that its new law decriminalizing small amounts of all street drugs had "failed." Under the Oregon law, which went into effect last February, those found with personal-use amounts of drugs, such as including heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, LSD, oxycodone and ecstasy, would be slapped with fines instead of criminal charges.

In the first six months of the law, fatal overdoses skyrocketed, with unintentional opioid overdose deaths jumping from 472 to 739 in 2021. Less than 1% of drug users who accessed drug treatment services opted for rehabilitation programs, data shows.

Instead, homeless drug users have been left to party all night and sleep all day, Wendy said.

There are over [6,600 homeless people in Portland](#) across more than 700 encampments. Although the city's [Mayor Ted Wheeler announced in October plans](#) to ban the camps, the tent cities have largely remained undisturbed by city officials, including police.

"Here you don't have any police. There's no police around," Wendy said. "You get hurt, you're screwed because they're not helping anybody. You don't see them anywhere."

Wendy claimed that she "used to be like everybody else" before falling on hard times. She used to run her own hair salon in Washington, owned a house and drove a Lexus, but told Dahlgren she lost everything after losing her husband.

Wendy said she wants to return to cutting hair and get another job, but can't until she gets a new pair of dentures — her last pair was stolen right from her own tent, she said.

"They do that here," she said.

Dahlgren revealed Monday that he had set up a fundraiser for Wendy to get her a new pair of dentures and that the video series had helped Wendy's brother finally find where his homeless sister had been living.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 TSA most unusual finds in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/what-were-tsas-most-unusual-finds-in-2022/">https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/transportation/what-were-tsas-most-unusual-finds-in-2022/</a>
GIST	<p>We already know that Transportation Security Administration (TSA) officers are on the ball when it comes to firearm detection, but some of their <a href="#">2022 catches</a> were more unusual than others, and that's without including the live cat zipped into someone's baggage.</p> <p>Top of the list for most unusual finds was fentanyl hidden inside candy wrappers. TSA officers at Los Angeles International Airport found thousands of pills inside the wrappers in October. The suspected trafficker fled the scene.</p> <p>We previously reported on the gun inside a raw chicken, which was found by TSA officers at Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport in November. And just last month, a TSA officer at John F. Kennedy International Airport <a href="#">TSA officer found parts of a disassembled semi-automatic handgun artfully concealed inside two jars of peanut butter</a>. Rounding out the Top 5 are a sling with a hidden surprise and some sharp tech...</p> <p>In September, the security team at Frederick Douglass Greater Rochester International Airport was screening a passenger who was wearing a sling on his arm. The sling triggered an alarm and so the traveler was asked if he could please remove the sling and place it into a bin. The traveler handed over his sling and mentioned to the officers that it was heavy because it had metal in it. However, the reason for the extra weight in what was supposed to be an empty sling was that upon closer inspection, there was a loaded handgun concealed inside. Unbelievably the traveler told officials that he forgot that he had his loaded gun with him—just inches from his hand.</p>

In November, a man was stopped by TSA officers at a Richmond International Airport security checkpoint after they detected a [double-bladed knife that was concealed inside the inner workings of his laptop](#). The traveler initially claimed that he had no idea that there was a knife inside his laptop, however after the knife was revealed, he confirmed that the knife was his.

Elsewhere, TSA officers at Washington Dulles International Airport detected two electric cattle prods packed alongside a guitar inside a carry-on guitar case; drugs were found concealed in hair scrunchies at Boise Airport; at Hartsfield–Jackson Atlanta International Airport TSA officers found a gun concealed in a Playstation; an inert grenade was detected at Milwaukee Mitchell International Airport; and one traveler arrived at the El Paso International Airport checkpoint with soiled money hidden inside crutches.

As we begin 2023, the mind boggles to think what TSA officers may find at the checkpoints this year.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Study: Washington best state to retire in</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-listed-best-state-to-retire-in-research-shows-elderly-global-residence-index-factors-key-united-states-study-medicaid-top-ten-seattle-king-county-tacoma-life-expectancy-factors-health-safety-happiness#">https://komonews.com/news/local/washington-listed-best-state-to-retire-in-research-shows-elderly-global-residence-index-factors-key-united-states-study-medicaid-top-ten-seattle-king-county-tacoma-life-expectancy-factors-health-safety-happiness#</a>
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — Out of all 50 states, Washington has been listed as the best state to retire in, according to research by <a href="#">Global Residence Index</a>.</p> <p>“Retirement is a crucial stage of someone's life and choosing a place that is happy, healthy and safe is imperative,” said a spokesperson for Global Residence Index.</p> <p>The research used seven key factors to rank each of the 50 states, and Washington ranked in the top 10 for five of the seven factors.</p> <p>Air quality, life expectancy, violent crime reports, environment quality, Medicaid spending, and 65+ population were considered the most important factors for those of retirement age, according to Global Residence Index.</p> <p>Another key factor in the research was that Washington held the second highest life expectancy in the United States at 79.2 years.</p> <p>“There are hundreds of factors to be accounted for when it comes to living a positive and prosperous life, especially during retirement,” a spokesperson for Global Residence Index said. “Community, environment, safety and health are some of the vital factors to consider when choosing the best state to retire in.”</p> <p>Behind Washington in second place was Minnesota, which is the number one state in the country for social support, according to research.</p> <p>The top 10 states to retire in according to Global Residence Index:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Washington</li><li>2. Minnesota</li><li>3. Massachusetts</li><li>4. Hawaii</li><li>5. Oregon</li><li>6. New York</li><li>7. California</li><li>8. Vermont</li><li>9. Connecticut</li><li>10. New Hampshire</li></ol>



	Alabama is listed as the worst state to retire in with the fourth worst life expectancy at 73.2 and in the top 10 states with the worst air quality, according to Global Research Index.
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## Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Mexico military border state after jail break</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/head-mexican-jailbreak-prison-fired-deadly-manhunt-gathers-pace-2023-01-03/">https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/head-mexican-jailbreak-prison-fired-deadly-manhunt-gathers-pace-2023-01-03/</a>
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY/CIUDAD JUAREZ, Jan 3 (Reuters) - Mexico's defense ministry said on Tuesday it had flown 200 military personnel to the northern border city of Juarez to fight organized crime there, days after a deadly prison riot led to a manhunt for escaped convicts.</p> <p>Authorities also sacked the director of the prison, from which at least 30 inmates escaped, they said Tuesday.</p> <p>State prosecutors in the border state of Chihuahua said Alejandro Alvarado, head of the Juarez prison, had been dismissed, and is also under investigation for his possible role in the jailbreak, alongside others.</p> <p>On Sunday, 19 people died after gunmen attacked the prison a few miles south of El Paso, Texas, killing guards and inmates and triggering a mass escape that included cartel kingpin Ernesto Alfredo Pinon de la Cruz, also known as "El Neto."</p> <p>Federal authorities arrived to restore order, later finding a "VIP zone" in the state-run prison with drugs and money.</p> <p>Prisoners' relatives queued outside the prison on Tuesday, some asking to speak to authorities.</p> <p>Maria Luisa Pena, an inmate's aunt, told Reuters authorities had yet to give her information about her nephew's situation.</p> <p>"We're worried," she said, "We want to know what's happening with our relatives, we want them to tell us something."</p> <p>"We're all humans, aren't we? We all make mistakes. Now many of us want the opportunity to know what's happening with our relatives," added an inmate's wife, who was not identified.</p> <p>On Monday night, Chihuahua's government said seven people had died during subsequent police clashes as part of the hunt to find the escaped inmates. Two of the dead were police.</p> <p>Sunday's incident resulted in one of the highest death tolls from prison violence in Mexico in recent years.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Denmark: no bank robberies in 2022</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/danish-bank-workers-celebrate-full-year-without-robberies">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/03/danish-bank-workers-celebrate-full-year-without-robberies</a>
GIST	<p>Denmark has recorded its first year without bank robberies, as the use of cash has dwindled in recent years, the country's finance workers' union said.</p> <p>The increasingly cashless society had led banks to reduce their cash services, the union said on Monday, leaving little potential loot for robbers.</p> <p>"It's nothing short of amazing. Because every time it happens, it's an extreme strain on the employees involved," said Steen Lund Olsen, the vice-president of the union, Finansforbundet.</p>

“It’s something you can’t even begin to understand the emotional impact of if you haven’t experienced it yourself,” he added.

The union said there had been 221 bank robberies in 2000, a number that slowly decreased to less than 10 a year since 2017.

[Denmark](#)’s central bank reported in March last year that the use of cash had fallen from 23% of payments in 2017 to 12% in 2021.

The Covid pandemic accelerated the abandonment of cash, said the bank.

The finance workers’ union noted that while holdups had become scarce, “many bank employees who have been robbed continue to struggle with the consequences”. Some still suffered from symptoms such as “anxiety, sadness, irritability, restlessness and insomnia”.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/04 Honduras declares war against gangs</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/honduras-gangs-crackdown-xiomara-castro">https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/04/honduras-gangs-crackdown-xiomara-castro</a>
GIST	<p>As dusk fell, a helicopter hovered menacingly over a dusty football field where several hundred police officers stood in formation, waiting for the clock to strike six – and the imposition of a state of exception partially suspending constitutional guarantees in Honduras.</p> <p>When the time came, the police departed in caravans to gang-infested neighbourhoods throughout the capital city, as part of an effort to combat an apparent rise in extortion.</p> <p>“I’m nervous,” repeated a young police officer driving a pickup truck crowded with heavily armed special forces officers. “It’s dangerous there.”</p> <p>His unit was headed to the Hole – a labyrinthine neighbourhood of narrow streets, whose nickname was originally coined because of its location between sharp hillsides, but which has taken on a new meaning as a place where gang members disappear.</p> <p>The mission in early December was ostensibly to raid a casa loca, an abandoned home used by gang members. But before arriving, the car stopped and the caravan split. A local TV correspondent needed to do a live shot for one of the country’s most-watched news programs.</p> <p>As the camera rolled, the police began stopping vehicles passing by in the background, running ID cards and frisking occupants. When more cameras arrived, men were forced to take off their shirts so the police could inspect them for gang tattoos in front of the bright lights.</p> <p>It was a show: a show of force following the example set by the hardline policies of neighbouring El Salvador, where President Nayib Bukele has led a controversial crackdown on gangs that has led to the detention of more than 2% of its adult population.</p> <p>On 24 November, Honduras’s leftwing president, Xiomara Castro, declared war on extortion – a very real problem that causes economic stagnation, fuels violence and forces countless Hondurans to flee the country.</p> <p>But like any war, it isn’t just a battle against an enemy, but also for control of the popular narrative – in this case, an attempt to counter allegations that the government has not done enough to combat rampant crime.</p> <p>This perception has grown despite a slight reduction in homicides this year, according to preliminary data, and a significant drop over the past decade since Honduras held the ignominious title of the world’s most violent country.</p>

There is only anecdotal evidence of the scale of the problem because so few extortion victims report the crime, making a statistical analysis impossible. Security experts are divided on how much the perception is the result of sensationalist media coverage, a real rise, a little of both – or simply the continued expansion of a problem that has metastasized for two decades.

“I wouldn’t dare to say that [extortion] has skyrocketed because it has been so high for many years,” said Leticia Salomón, a sociologist and researcher with the Documentation Center of Honduras. “This is an issue that has not been taken seriously by the Honduran state.”

But it’s clear that extortion is occurring in areas where it didn’t in the past, and there is no disagreement, among experts or others, on the gravity of the problem. How to tackle it is another issue.

In the streets where insecurity lurks around each corner, many ordinary Hondurans want to see extreme measures – human rights be damned – and believe that anything short of that is not enough.

“I agree with Bukele and I want the same here. Xiomara should hurry up and go after all those gang members,” said Isidora Varela, 70, at her market stand in downtown Tegucigalpa.

For Varela, who said she had never been a victim of extortion, but heard a lot about it as of late, human rights are just an obstacle. “Because of human rights, crime has gone on so long, because human rights defend the criminal, and it shouldn’t be like that,” she said.

Her words echo those of Bukele, who has railed against human rights groups, government watchdogs and journalists who have questioned his tactics, saying that they are on the side of the gangs. His security-at-all costs approach, and the reductions in violence and crime that have come with it, have found a captive audience in Honduras, but caused consternation among civil society, and closed down discussion of other options.

“Bukele’s example resonates in societies with a fragile institutional framework and with a tendency towards populism and authoritarianism,” said Ismael Moreno, a human rights defender. “If we didn’t have Bukele’s example, we could probably look for some control and security responses based on strengthening institutions.”

Despite some similarities, the security situation in El Salvador is different from Honduras, which has a much larger territory, higher population, greater poverty and a more diverse set of criminal groups.

Earlier this year, Honduras appeared set to follow an example set by another neighbor, Nicaragua, whose community-based policing approach was for years hailed for maintaining exceptionally low crime rates and minimal gang presence until the government turned the police into a repressive force against the people amid widespread protests in 2018.

In Honduras, steps were taken to demilitarize public security forces and a community policing model was announced, with the hope being that the measures would increase public trust in an institution that has historically been dogged by corruption and infiltrated by the very same organized crime groups it is supposed to combat.

But the removal of military officers from an anti-gang taskforce resulted in a messy divorce that temporarily reduced the unit’s already limited capacity – opening a window for criminals – and before the community policing model could have any effect, the political pressure to take decisive action against extortion boiled over.

Police presented a comprehensive plan to reform laws and ramp up institutional capacity – measures that experts believe could have a positive effect long-term – but which were pushed aside by the short-term political decision to declare a state of exception.

Police reforms are most successful when “they’re coupled with investments in social services and cross-cutting investments to address some of the root causes like poverty and exclusion that can cause crime in the first place”, said Mary Malone, a professor at the University of New Hampshire who has studied policing in Central America.

Hardline policies, meanwhile, are “popular because people think that they’re going to work – but inevitably the track record is that they haven’t”, said Malone.

So far, the state of exception in Honduras has produced some arrests and forced the gangs and other criminal groups to keep a lower profile. But it has not yet resulted in an increase in police reports – a key measure of public trust. Some victims of extortion said that the only thing that has changed is how the money is collected.

Nevertheless, the political gains to be had from emulating Bukele’s hardline policies may be too enticing to pass up. Honduras declared the state of exception for 30 days in 162 neighborhoods, some politicians have already called for it to be extended in duration and territory.

Meanwhile, as Guatemala’s electoral season heats up ahead of next year’s presidential election, some candidates have signaled that if elected, they would also implement hardline policies.

“I believe that [Bukele’s] leadership is increasing, because the tendency of the Bukele government is to become Central American, and to exercise leadership in all of Central America,” said Moreno.

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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Pa. police: Idaho murder suspect</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/university-of-idaho-students-killed/idaho-murders-update-pennsylvania-police-press-conference/293-8ef78a1e-3d77-4c74-ab95-69a8c55f728d">https://www.krem.com/article/news/crime/university-of-idaho-students-killed/idaho-murders-update-pennsylvania-police-press-conference/293-8ef78a1e-3d77-4c74-ab95-69a8c55f728d</a>
GIST	<p>MONROE COUNTY, Pa. — After the University of Idaho murder suspect waived his right to an extradition hearing Tuesday, the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) held a press conference regarding his arrest and the agency's next steps in the investigation.</p> <p>28-year-old Bryan Kohberger <a href="#">was arrested in Monroe County, Pa., early Friday morning</a> concerning the <a href="#">murders of four University of Idaho students</a>. <a href="#">Kohberger waived his right to an extradition hearing</a> on Tuesday and agreed to willingly return to Idaho to face first-degree murder charges.</p> <p>After Kohberger waived his extradition, PSP Major Christopher Paris, PSP Colonel Robert Evanchick and Monroe County First Assistant District Attorney Michael Mancuso held a press conference to discuss the arrest.</p> <p>Evanchick said he did not imagine the murder investigation would make its way to Pennsylvania but said the culmination of cooperation and communication ultimately led to Kohberger's arrest.</p> <p>"The officers, troopers and federal agents worked together tirelessly, putting in long, difficult hours," Evanchick said. "Communication and cooperation are imperative to success and to ensure the integrity of the case remains maintained."</p> <p>According to Paris, PSP was contacted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) about assisting in the surveillance of Kohberger just days before his arrest. As the investigation progressed, PSP's criminal investigation section began working with authorities in Idaho to secure fugitive from justice warrants for Kohberger.</p> <p>Once those warrants were obtained, the PSP Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) was selected to execute those warrants. In total, four warrants relating to this case were served: one for Kohberger, one for the house he was arrested at, one for the white Hyundai Elantra and the arrest warrant.</p>

	<p>"From their perspective, we essentially tasked them to go out and serve an arrest warrant for someone accused of a quadruple murder," Paris said.</p> <p>SERT began preparations to serve the search and arrest warrants against Kohberger on the night on Dec. 29. In the early morning hours of Dec. 30, Kohberger was arrested without incident and taken into custody.</p> <p>"It's my sincere hope that this marks a clear step in the right direction of effectuating justice for those folks," Mancuso said.</p> <p>The probable cause affidavit related to the case will remain sealed until Kohberger is back in Idaho and given a copy of the document. However, Mancuso said Kohberger's decision to waive extradition is "a significant development."</p> <p>"Having read those documents and the sealed affidavits of probable cause, I definitely believe that one of the main reasons the defendant chose to waive extradition and hurry to return back to Idaho was a need to know what was in those documents," Mancuso said.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Marysville cracks down on public drug use</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/marysville-public-drug-users/281-c452d1f4-24bf-4b71-b12d-a982c4cfa628">https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/marysville-public-drug-users/281-c452d1f4-24bf-4b71-b12d-a982c4cfa628</a>
GIST	<p>MARYSVILLE, Wash. — Marysville has enacted a law that allows officers to arrest someone for a first offense of using drugs in a public place.</p> <p>The move is in reaction to more lenient laws put in place by the state legislature.</p> <p>"The one thing that drives crime is drug addiction," says Marysville Police Sgt. Derek Carlile. "Everybody thinks drugs are legal now so they can do drugs wherever they want."</p> <p>It's the most frustrating part of the job for Carlile, a 14-year police veteran.</p> <p>So, Marysville police officers are getting tough on drug users, once again.</p> <p>Recent changes to state laws have handcuffed police when it comes to drug offenses. A state law requires police to offer treatment at least two times before arresting someone for using drugs in public.</p> <p>But Marysville has now passed a local law making a first offense a misdemeanor punishable by jail time. Sgt. Carlile made the new law known to a person he caught smoking fentanyl in his car.</p> <p>"Just so you know there's a new law that Marysville has enacted that if you're caught with drugs like this you actually get criminally charged and can go to jail now," he told the man.</p> <p>The new law targets public bathrooms, bus stops, parks – all of which are problem areas for police.</p> <p>The move comes amidst a growing school of thought that putting users in jail hasn't helped cure America's addiction crisis.</p> <p>But Marysville Police Chief Erik Scairpon says users need to know there are consequences for their actions.</p> <p>"We're not trying to arrest ourselves out of a drug epidemic," Scairpon explains, "but we do know when people are in our criminal justice system that it gives them an incentive to want to get better."</p>

	<p>While there is much debate about the tactic, addiction outreach worker Mike Kersey agrees with Sclairpon.</p> <p>He says the threat of five years in prison set him straight 23 years ago.</p> <p>"Something has got to change," Kersey says. "For me, it took that extra nudge from a judge and looking at jail time to get clean and sober. Holding me accountable with a probation officer is what I needed."</p> <p>Marysville police can still use their individual discretion when it comes to deciding whether to arrest someone.</p> <p>As was the case with the man in the car, Sgt. Carlile gave him a referral for treatment.</p>
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<b>HEADLINE</b>	<b>01/03 Idaho suspect waives extradition fight</b>
<b>SOURCE</b>	<a href="https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/suspect-idaho-student-murders-extradition/281-f1d1a246-0dd5-49b8-a694-c550e47c275b">https://www.king5.com/article/news/crime/suspect-idaho-student-murders-extradition/281-f1d1a246-0dd5-49b8-a694-c550e47c275b</a>
<b>GIST</b>	<p>STROUDSBURG, Pa. — A criminology graduate student facing first-degree murder charges in the November slayings of four University of Idaho students waived his right to an extradition hearing in a Pennsylvania court on Tuesday, speeding up his transfer to Idaho where he will stand trial.</p> <p>Bryan Kohberger, a 28-year-old doctoral student and teaching assistant at Washington State University, was arrested early Friday by state police at his parents' home in eastern Pennsylvania, authorities said.</p> <p>Idaho officials are now expected to arrange for Kohberger's transport back to Idaho — a process that is generally kept secret because of security concerns. He is expected to be transferred within the next 10 days, according to officials.</p> <p>THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.</p> <p>A criminology graduate student facing first-degree murder charges in the November slayings of four University of Idaho students is not expected to fight extradition at a hearing Tuesday in Pennsylvania, where he was arrested last week at his parents' home.</p> <p>Bryan Kohberger, a 28-year-old doctoral student and teaching assistant at Washington State University, was taken into custody early Friday by state police in eastern Pennsylvania, authorities said.</p> <p>The chief public defender in Monroe County, Pennsylvania said his client is eager to be exonerated and plans to tell a judge in Pennsylvania that he will waive his extradition hearing so he can be quickly taken to Idaho.</p> <p>Kohberger should be presumed innocent and "not tried in the court of public opinion," said the public defender, Jason LaBar.</p> <p>Capt. Anthony Dahlinger, of the Moscow Police Department in Idaho, told The Associated Press on Saturday that authorities believe Kohberger was responsible for all four slayings. The students were stabbed to death at a rental home near campus in Moscow, Idaho, sometime in the early morning hours of Nov. 13.</p> <p>"We believe we've got our man," said Dahlinger, adding that investigators obtained samples of Kohberger's DNA directly from him after he was arrested.</p> <p>DNA evidence played a key role in identifying Kohberger as a suspect, and officials were able to match his DNA to genetic material recovered during the investigation, a law enforcement official said last week. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss details of the ongoing investigation.</p>



Investigators have said they are still looking for a murder weapon and a motive for the killings.

Federal and state investigators are combing through Kohberger's background, financial records and electronic communications as they work to build the case against him, the official who spoke anonymously said. The investigators are also interviewing people who knew Kohberger, including those at Washington State University, the official said.

Kohberger's relatives in Pennsylvania have expressed sympathy for the families of the victims but vowed to support him and promote "his presumption of innocence."

His parents, Michael and Maryann, and his two older sisters, Amanda and Melissa, said in a statement released Sunday by his attorney that they "care deeply for the four families who have lost their precious children. There are no words that can adequately express the sadness we feel, and we pray each day for them."

The family said that relatives will continue to let the legal process unfold, and that "as a family we will love and support our son and brother." They say they have fully cooperated with law enforcement to try to "seek the truth and promote his presumption of innocence rather than judge unknown facts and make erroneous assumptions."

Latah County prosecutors in Idaho have said they believe Kohberger broke into the students' home near the university campus intending to commit murder. Their bodies were found Nov. 13, several hours after investigators believe they died.

The students were: Kaylee Goncalves, 21, of Rathdrum, Idaho; Madison Mogen, 21, of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho; Xana Kernodle, 20, of Post Falls, Idaho; and Ethan Chapin, 20, of Conway, Washington. They were close friends and members of the university's Greek system.

Mogen, Goncalves and Kernodle lived in the three-story rental home with two other roommates. Kernodle and Chapin were dating, and he had been visiting the house that night.

Latah County prosecutors have said the affidavit for four charges of first-degree murder will remain sealed until he is returned. He is also charged with felony burglary.

Investigators have asked for information about Kohberger from anyone who knows him, and Dahlinger said investigators got 400 calls to a tip line within the first hour of that request. He said they were "trying to build this picture now of him: Who he is, his history, how we got to this event, why this event occurred."

#### **Idaho murder suspect pulled over twice in Indiana**

Kohberger was pulled over twice traveling through Indiana on Dec. 15, weeks after the students' deaths.

The first occurred around 10:40 a.m. when a member of the Hancock County Sheriff's Office conducted a traffic stop of a Hyundai Elantra along Interstate 7 for following too closely to another vehicle.

There were two males in the vehicle. Kohberger was driving, as seen on bodycam footage.

Kohberger was released with a verbal warning. At the time of the stop, according to the sheriff's office, there was no information on the suspect for the crimes in Idaho, including identifying information or specific information on the vehicle.

Minutes later, Kohberger was stopped by Indiana State police for, once again, following too closely to another vehicle.

	The trooper who pulled Kohberger learned the vehicle was stopped minutes before by a deputy and, using his discretion, released the driver.
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Charge: pipe bomb Seattle parking garage</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-charged-with-allegedly-placing-pipe-bomb-in-seattle-parking-garage/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-charged-with-allegedly-placing-pipe-bomb-in-seattle-parking-garage/</a>
GIST	<p>King County prosecutors charged a 43-year-old man on Tuesday with <a href="#">allegedly placing a pipe bomb in a Sodo parking garage</a> last week.</p> <p>Osman Ibrahim was formally charged with possession of an explosive device and second-degree malicious placement.</p> <p>Video surveillance footage from Dec. 26 shows a man, later identified by police as Ibrahim, covering a security camera in a parking garage in the 900 block of South Horton Street. Two days later, Ibrahim is seen on surveillance footage covering the camera again, according to court documents. A metal pipe device was visible in security footage once Ibrahim uncovered the camera, according to documents.</p> <p>Seattle police arrived at the garage around 8:05 a.m. Dec. 29, after an employee called to report a suspicious item that looked like a pipe bomb, according to probable cause documents.</p> <p>The employee found the pipe bomb while doing a routine cleanup and inspection of the area, documents say.</p> <p>Seattle police bomb squad members determined the bomb was real and cleared the area, according to court documents. As officials worked to make the device safe, an officer saw Ibrahim pass by on a bicycle and <a href="#">another officer arrested Ibrahim</a>.</p> <p>Ibrahim later told a detective that he had been in the garage and left the pipe bomb behind because he had no use for it, according to court documents.</p> <p>The pipe bomb was taken to a demolition range to be safely disposed of, according to probable cause documents.</p> <p>Ibrahim is being held in lieu of \$350,000 bail, according to charging documents. His arraignment is scheduled for Jan. 12.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Federal charges substations attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/two-charged-in-pierce-county-christmas-day-substation-attacks/">https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/two-charged-in-pierce-county-christmas-day-substation-attacks/</a>
GIST	<p>TACOMA — Federal prosecutors have charged two men in the Christmas Day substation attacks in Pierce County that caused power outages and an alleged \$3 million in damage.</p> <p>Matthew Greenwood, 32, and Jeremy Crahan, 40, both of Puyallup, face federal charges of conspiracy to damage energy facilities. Greenwood faces an additional charge of possession of an unregistered firearm. Prosecutors say the men attacked two Tacoma Power and two Puget Sound Energy substations, according to a statement by U.S. Attorney Nick Brown, who commended the FBI for quickly identifying the suspects.</p> <p>Both men made a brief appearance in U.S. District Court in Tacoma on Tuesday afternoon, where Magistrate Judge J. Richard Creatura ruled they should continue to be held at a federal detention center until a hearing scheduled for Jan. 10. No pleas were entered, and the two men, clad in green coveralls, did not speak.</p>

Brown said in an interview that the investigation into the case is ongoing. So far, he said, law enforcement officials have not turned up evidence to indicate there was a political motive driving the attack.

“There’s a lot more work to be done. Not surprising, sometimes people’s criminal activity is not the most logical or rational,” Brown said. “And without getting too far ahead of myself, I think that is probably the case here.”

A criminal complaint unsealed Tuesday said the two men were identified as possible suspects through the analysis of cellphone records. Also, surveillance cameras at one of the substations captured images of one suspect and a pickup truck that appeared to be connected to the attack. A similar pickup had been connected to the defendants, and when law enforcement served a search warrant on the home of the suspects, they recovered “distinctive clothing” pictured in surveillance photos, prosecutors say.

Two surveillance photos included in the complaint show a man with a cloth covering part of his face and torso, holding something in his gloved right hand.

The complaint said the attacks caused about \$3 million in damage, and Tacoma Power will need to use two mobile transformer units at each of its substations to provide power. Repairs could take up to 36 months to complete.

FBI Special Agent Mark Tucher, who investigated the attacks, is assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force of the FBI’s Seattle Division, primarily investigating domestic terrorism.

The two Tacoma Power substations and one of the PSE substations were attacked early Christmas Day, before daylight. The last attack happened at about 7:25 p.m. and resulted in a power outage and fire. Initial reports indicated the suspects cut a chain-link fence to gain entry, then tampered with a switch as they tried to pry open equipment. This caused the substation to start arcing and sparking, according to the complaint.

On Dec. 31, when federal agents and local law enforcement executed warrants, they found Greenwood in a fifth-wheel trailer, and found a short-barreled rifle with what appeared to be a homemade silencer and a short-barreled shotgun.

The criminal complaint does reference a motive, as described by Greenwood.

Greenwood, in a statement to law enforcement after he was arrested and read Miranda rights, said he and Crahan had been planning to disrupt power to commit a burglary, according to the complaint. Greenwood said he entered all four substations using bolt cutters, while Crahan acted as a getaway driver, according to the complaint.

After the morning attacks, the two men went to a local business, drilled out a lock and stole from a cash register, according to Greenwood’s statement cited in the complaint.

Holly Fisher identified herself as Greenwood’s girlfriend in an interview Tuesday at the Puyallup property where they lived. She said she was inside the trailer when agents broke windows and threw flash-bang grenades during the arrest.

“He figured that a power outage would make it so they could get inside somewhere and take something of value,” Fisher said of Greenwood.

Fisher said through tears that she is eight months pregnant and that Greenwood was out of work and scared about not having money to support their child. The couple had been evicted from another home earlier in December. And, after watching television reports of other attacks, Greenwood and Crahan came up with the plan to cut power from substations as cover for the theft, she said.

“He isn’t a terrorist. He is just trying to support me and the baby I’m going to have in three weeks,” Fisher said. “He wasn’t thinking about the damage that could be done to other people. He was desperate.”

Tom Nobel, who leases a house near the trailer where the couple lives, said he watched law enforcement officials arrive on the property Saturday.

“All of a sudden, about a dozen cars come roaring around the corner. All of these agents get out. They’ve all got guns. They’re throwing flash-bangs,” Nobel said.

Nobel walked out a back door, and then an agent with a gun told him to get on the ground, he said.

The complaint does not indicate why four substations, including one at night, would be attacked for cover for a burglary.

Both men have past criminal records in Washington, according to court records, as well as prison records for Crahan.

Greenwood was convicted in 2018 of two counts of forgery and one count of taking a car without permission, Pierce County court records show. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced to about four months in jail. Last year, he was charged in Kitsap County with car theft. He pleaded not guilty and the case is pending.

Crahan, in 2016, pleaded guilty to possession of stolen property after he admitted to helping burglarize a Gig Harbor home, Pierce County court records show. In 2014, he pleaded guilty to five counts of identity theft after admitting to possessing bank cards and other financial information of five people. Crahan served a total of 54 months in prison, according to Toby Hatley, a spokesperson for the state Department of Corrections. In a 2014 DOC intake form, Crahan wrote that he had a severe alcohol and methamphetamine problem.

Crahan also had several previous convictions in Pierce County for theft and attempting to elude law enforcement, as well as a 2007 DUI conviction in Alaska, according to a criminal history filed as part of sentencing in his 2016 case.

Greenwood and Crahan face up to 20 years in prison for the charge of conspiracy to damage energy facilities.

During the Tuesday hearing, U.S. Attorney Steve Hobbs described the crime as an act of terrorism in arguing that Greenwood and Crahan should remain detained.

Brown said that this crime falls under the “statutory structure” of terrorism but that the term was not used to imply that prosecutors, at this point, had evidence of a political motive behind the substation attacks.

He said that the investigation also will continue to look for any connections to other substation attacks that occurred in the Pacific Northwest. Six were reported in Washington and Oregon in November.

“As of now, it stands alone as its own separate and distinct case,” Brown said. “We’ve obviously seen a number of similar targets attacked here and nationally as well. But there’s not indication, as of today, that those are all tied together. But there is more work for us to do.”

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HEADLINE	01/03 Tacoma police: rash ATM armed robberies
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.kiro7.com/news/south-sound-news/police-investigating-rash-armed-robberies-tacoma-atms/D7ISBSENRZFAPJTQJWVBMFG6NU/">https://www.kiro7.com/news/south-sound-news/police-investigating-rash-armed-robberies-tacoma-atms/D7ISBSENRZFAPJTQJWVBMFG6NU/</a>

GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police detectives are investigating a rash of recent robberies at ATMs.</p> <p>The victims are being robbed at gunpoint while withdrawing money.</p> <p>The police department has released few details but asked the public to be vigilant and aware of their surroundings.</p> <p>Since Tacoma police posted a warning on social media, people have been commenting on the post, asking which ATMs to avoid.</p> <p>While authorities did not respond to the questions, several people said to avoid the ATM in the area of Pacific and 72nd and recommended going inside the Fred Meyer store instead.</p> <p>Commenters also said to avoid using the ATM off 56th Street that's in the parking lot of the Grocery Outlet store.</p>
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HEADLINE	<b>01/03 Arrests: Pierce Co. substations attacks</b>
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270620242.html">https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article270620242.html</a>
GIST	<p>Two Puyallup men are facing criminal charges in federal court related to Christmas Day attacks on power substations in Pierce County.</p> <p>Matthew Greenwood, 32, and Jeremy Crahan, 40, were arrested Saturday, Dec. 31, 2022, following a fast-moving investigation involving the FBI and local law enforcement agencies. Federal prosecutors will ask that both men remain detained at the Federal Detention Center at SeaTac pending future hearings.</p> <p>The men are charged with conspiracy to damage energy facilities and possession of an unregistered firearm, announced U.S. Attorney Nick Brown.</p> <p>“I commend the work by the FBI to quickly identify these suspects and disrupt any future attacks on the east Pierce County power grid,” Brown said in a news release. “We have seen attacks such as these increase in Western Washington and throughout the country and must treat each incident seriously. The outages on Christmas left thousands in the dark and cold and put some who need power for medical devices at extreme risk.”</p> <p>Richard A. Collodi, special agent in charge of the FBI’s Seattle field office, said the two men arrested are believed to be responsible for all four attacks.</p> <p>According to the criminal complaint filed with the court late Saturday and unsealed Tuesday, the two men were identified as possible suspects through the analysis of cell phone records. At one of the substations, Tacoma Power captured images of one suspect and the image of a pickup that appeared to be connected with the attack. A similar truck was connected to the defendants. When law enforcement served a search warrant on the home of the suspects, they recovered distinctive clothing pictured in the surveillance photos. Agents also seized two short-barreled firearms that had not been registered as required by law. One of the firearms was equipped with a make-shift silencer.</p> <p>According to charging papers, Greenwood told law enforcement officers that he and Crahan planned the power disruptions to aid a burglary. After the attacks on substations in Graham and South Hill, they broke into a local business affected by the power outage and robbed the cash register. The four substations that were targeted were the Graham and Elk Plain substations operated by Tacoma Power and the Kapowsin and Hemlock substations operated by Puget Sound Energy. The damage to the Tacoma Power substations is estimated to be at least \$3 million.</p> <p>Conspiracy to attack energy facilities is punishable by up to 20 years in prison. Possession of an unregistered firearm is punishable by up to 10 years in prison.</p>

	The FBI is investigating the case with assistance from the Pierce County Sheriff's Department, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives (ATF), Tacoma Police Department, the Washington State Department of Corrections and the Federal Protective Service.
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HEADLINE	01/03 Idaho judge issues gag order
SOURCE	<a href="https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/crime/article270737577.html">https://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/crime/article270737577.html</a>
GIST	<p>The sometimes tight-lipped nature of the investigation into the killing of four University of Idaho students and Friday's arrest of suspect Bryan C. Kohberger is about to get even quieter.</p> <p>Latah County Magistrate Judge Megan Marshall on Tuesday issued a nondissemination order that "prohibits any communication by investigators, law enforcement personnel, attorneys, and agents of the prosecuting attorney or defense attorney concerning this case," the Moscow Police Department said in a news release.</p> <p>This happened hours after Kohberger waived extradition in a Pennsylvania court, allowing his transport to Idaho within 10 days to face four first-degree murder charges.</p> <p>Moscow police said earlier in the day that details of the suspect's transfer to Idaho would be kept secret "for security reasons."</p> <p>Moscow police said that in line with Marshall's order, the department will "no longer be communicating with the public or the media regarding this case."</p> <p>The judge's order states that all parties "are prohibited from making extrajudicial statements, written or oral, concerning this case, other than a quotation from or reference to, without comment, the public records."</p> <p>The probable cause affidavit that lays out the case against Kohberger remains under seal per Idaho statute, but it was expected to become public once the suspect is in Idaho and the charges are entered in court. The order is not expected to affect the unsealing of the affidavit, a spokesperson for the Idaho judicial branch told the Idaho Statesman.</p> <p>"As stated in the order itself, this applies to the parties of the case, not the records of the case," spokesperson Nate Poppino said in a phone interview. "We talk fairly regularly about, 'The court speaks through its records.' This is setting up the record of the case to be the source of information of the case."</p> <p>The judge's order prohibits "any statement which a reasonable person would expect to be disseminated by means of public communication that relates" to certain areas, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evidence in the Kohberger case</li> <li>• Character, credibility or criminal record</li> <li>• Any opinion as to the case's merits or "claims or defense of a party</li> <li>• Any other matter reasonably likely to interfere with a fair trial</li> </ul> <p>The order will remain in effect until there is a verdict or the court modifies its stipulations, Marshall wrote.</p>
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